THE MAN NEXT DOOR

Emerson Hough

Fannie L. Baxter
5 Park St
Brookline

March 1925

THE MAN NEXT DOOR

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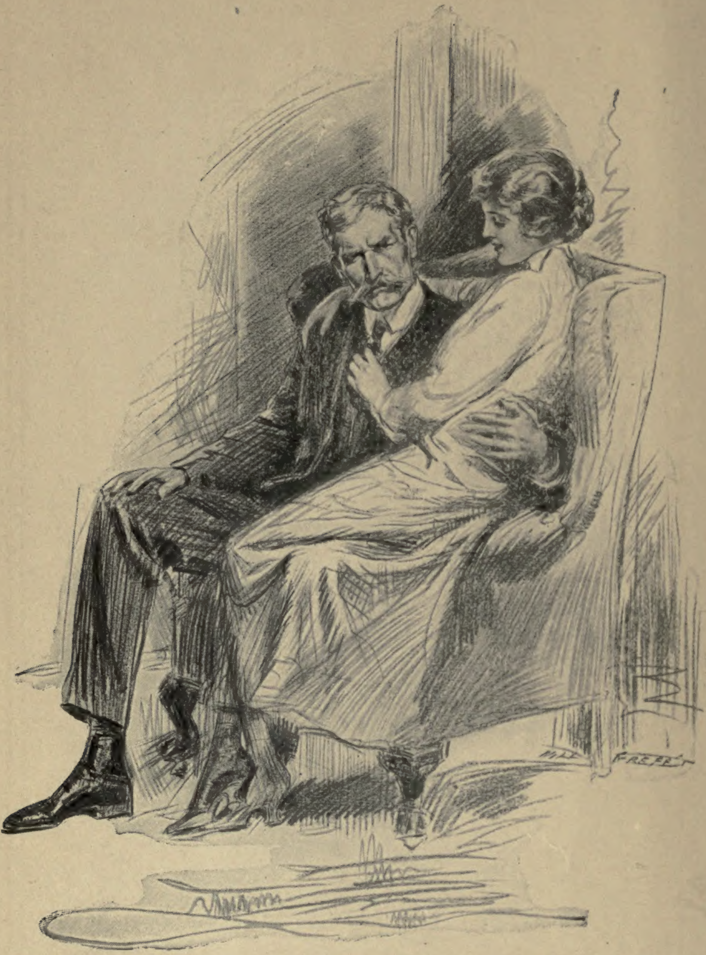

"'Well,' says she, 'we never played anything for pikers, did we, dad?'"

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THE
MAN NEXT DOOR

BY

EMERSON HOUGH

AUTHOR OF

THE COVERED WAGON,
NORTH OF 36, ETC.

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TO THE MEN WITH WHOM I RODE
IN THE OLD DAYS

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THE MAN NEXT DOOR

I

HOW COME US TO MOVE

BONNIE BELL was her real name — Bonnie Bell Wright. It sounds like a race horse or a yacht, but she was a girl. Like enough that name don't suit you exactly for a girl, but it suited her pa, Old Man Wright. I don't know as she ever was baptized by that name, or maybe baptized at all, for water was scarce in Wyoming; but it never would of been healthy to complain about that name before Old Man Wright or me, Curly. As far as that goes, she had other names too. Her ma called her Mary Isabel Wright; but her pa got to calling her Bonnie Bell some day when she was little, and it stuck, especial after her ma died.

That was when Bonnie Bell was only four years old, that her ma died, and her dying made a lot of difference on the ranch. I reckon Old Man Wright probably stole Bonnie Bell's ma somewhere back in the States when he was a young man. She must of loved him some or she wouldn't of came to Wyoming with him.

She was tallish, and prettier than any picture in colors — and game! She tried all her life to let on she liked the range, but she never was made for it.

Now to see her throw that bluff and get away with it with Old Man Wright — and no one else, especial me — and to see Old Man Wright worrying, trying to figure out what was wrong, and not being able to — that was the hardest thing any of us ever tried. The way he worked to make the ma of Bonnie Bell happy was plain for anybody to see. He'd stand and look at the place where he seen her go by last, and forget he had a rope in his hand and his horse a-waiting.

We had to set at the table, all three of us, after she died — him and the kid and me — and nobody at the end of the table where she used to set — her always in clothes that wasn't just like ours. I couldn't hardly stand it. But that was how game Old Man Wright was.

He wasn't really old. Like when he was younger, he was tall and straight, and had sandy hair and blue eyes, and weighed round a hundred and eighty, lean. Everybody on the range always had knew Old Man Wright. He was captain of the round-up when he was twenty and president of the cattle association as soon as it was begun. I don't know as a better cowman ever was in Wyoming. He grew up at it.

So did Bonnie Bell grow up at it, for that matter.

She pleased her pa a plenty, for she took to a saddle like a duck, so to speak. Time she was fifteen she could ride any of the stock we had, and if a bronc' pitched when she rid him she thought that was all right; she thought it was just a way horses had and something to be put up with that didn't amount to much. She didn't know no better. She never did think that anything or anybody in the world had it in for her noways whatever. She natural believed that everything and everybody liked her, for that was the way she felt and that was the way it shaped there on the range. There wasn't a hand on the place that would of allowed anything to cross Bonnie Bell in any way, shape or manner.

She grew up tallish, like her pa, and slim and round, same as her ma. She had brownish or yellowish hair, too, which was sunburned, for she never wore no bonnet; but her eyes was like her ma's, which was dark and not blue, though her skin was white like her pa's under his shirt sleeves, only she never had no freckles the way her pa had — some was large as nickels on him in places. She maybe had one freckle on her nose, but little.

Bonnie Bell was a rider from the time she was a baby, like I said, and she went into all the range work like she was built for it. Wild she was, like a filly or yearling that kicks up its heels when the sun shines and the wind blows. And pretty! Say, a new wagon with red wheels and yellow trimmings ain't fit for to compare with her, not none at all!

When her ma died Old Man Wright wasn't good for much for a long time, for he was always studying over something. Though he never talked a word about her I allow that somehow or other after she died he kind of come to the conclusion that maybe she hadn't been happy all the time, and he got to thinking that maybe he'd been to blame for it somehow. After it was too late, maybe, he seen that she couldn't never have grew to be no range woman, no matter how long she lived.

But still we all got to take things, and he done so the best he could; and after the kid begun to grow up he was happier. All the time he was a-rolling up the range and the stock, till he was richer than anybody you ever did see, though his clothes was just about the same. But, come round the time when Bonnie Bell was fourteen or fifteen years old, about proportionate like when a filly or heifer is a yearling or so, he begun to study more.

There was a room up in the half-story where sometimes we kept things we didn't need all the time — the fancy saddles and bridles and things. Some old trunks was in it. I reckon maybe Old Man Wright went up there sometimes when he didn't say nothing about it to nobody. Anyhow once I went up there for something and I seen him setting on the floor, something in his hand that he was looking at so steady he never heard me. I don't know what it was — picture maybe, or letter; and his face was different somehow — older like — so that he didn't seem like the same man. You see, Old Man Wright was maybe soft like on the inside, like plenty of us hard men are.

I crept out and felt right much to blame for seeing what I had, though I didn't mean to. Seems like all my life I had been seeing or hearing things I hadn't no business to — some folks never do things right. That's me. I never told Old Man Wright about my seeing him there and he don't know it yet. But it wasn't so long after that he come to me, and he hadn't been shaved for four days, and he was looking kind of odd; and he says to me:

"Curly, we're up against it for fair!" says he.

"Why, what's wrong, Colonel?" says I, for I seen something was wrong all right.

He didn't answer at first, but sort of throwed his hand round to show I was to come along.

At last he says:

"Curly, we're shore up against it!" He sighed then, like he'd lost a whole trainload of cows.

"What's up, Colonel?" says I. "Range thieves?"

"Hell, no!" says he. "I wish 'twas that — I'd like it."

"Well," says I, "we got plenty of this water, and we branded more than our average per cent of calves this spring." For such was so that year — everything was going fine. We stood to sell eighty thousand dollars' worth of beef cows that fall.

He didn't say a word, and I ast him if there was any nesters coming in; and he shook his head.

"I seen about that when I taken out my patents years ago. No; the range is safe. That's what's the matter with it; the title is good — too good."

"Well, Colonel," says I, some disgusted and getting up to walk away, "if ever you want to talk to me any send somebody to where I'm at. I'm busy."

"Set down, Curly," says he, not looking at me.

So I done so.

"Son," says he to me — he often called me that along of me being his segundo for so many years — "don't go away! I need you. I need something."

Now I ain't nothing but a freckled cowpuncher, with red hair, and some says both my eyes don't track the same, and I maybe toe in. Besides, I ain't got much education. But, you see, I've been with Old Man Wright so long we've kind of got to know each other — not that I'm any good for divine Providence neither.

"Curly," says he after a while when he got his nerve up, "Curly, it looks like I got to sell out — I got to sell the Circle Arrow!"

Huh! That was worse than anything that ever hit me all my life, and we've seen some trouble too. I couldn't say a word to that.

After about a hour he begun again.

"I reckon I got to sell her," says he. "I got to quit the game. Curly, you and me has got to make a change — I'm afraid I've got to sell her out — lock, stock and barrel."

"And not be a cowman no more?" says I.

He nods. I look round to see him close. He was plumb sober, and his face was solemn, like it was the time I caught him looking in the trunk.

"That irrigation syndicate is after me again," says he.

"Well, what of it?" says I. "Let 'em go some place else. It ain't needful for us to make no more money — we're plumb rich enough for anybody on earth. Besides, when a man is a cowman he's got as far as he can go — there ain't nothing in the world better than that. You know it and so do I."

He nods, for what I said was true, and he knowed it.

"Colonel," I ast him, "have you been playing poker?"

"Some," says he. "Down to the Cheyenne Club."

"How much did you lose?"

"I didn't lose nothing — I won several thousand dollars and eight hundred head of steers last week," says he.

"Well, then, what in hell is wrong?" says I.

"It goes back a long ways," says he after a while, and now his face looked more than ever like it did when he was there a-going through them trunks. I turns my own face away now, so as not to embarrass him, for I seen he was sort of off his balance.

"It's her," says the old man at last.

I might have knew that — might have knew it was either Bonnie Bell or her ma that he had in his mind all the time; but he couldn't say a damn word. He went on after a while:

"When she was sick I begun to get sort of afraid about things. One day she taken Bonnie Bell by one hand and me by the other, and says she to me: 'John Willie'— she called me that, though nobody knew it maybe —'John Willie,' says she, 'I want to ask something I never dared ask before, because I never did know before how much you cared for me real,' says she. Oh, damn it, Curly, it ain't nobody's business what she said."

After a while he went on again.

"'Lizzie,' says I to her, 'what is it? I'll do anything for you.'

"'Promise me, then, John Willie,' says she, 'that you'll educate my girl and give her the life she ought to have.'

"'Why, Lizzie,' says I, 'of course I will. I'll do anything in the world you say, the way you ask it.'

"'Then give her the place that she ought to have in life,' she says to me."

He stopped talking then for maybe a hour, and at last he says again:

"Well, Curly, let it go at that. I can't talk about things. I couldn't ever talk about her."

I couldn't talk neither. After a while he kind of went on, slow:

"The kid's fifteen now," says he at last. "She's going to be a looker like her ma. It's in her blood to grow up in the cow business too — that's me. But she's got it in her, besides, like her ma, to do something different.

"I don't like to do my duty no more than anybody else does, but it shore is my duty to educate that kid and give her a chance for a bigger start than she can get out here. It was that that was in her ma's mind all the time. She didn't want her girl to grow up out here in Wyoming; she wanted her to go back East and play the game — the big game — the limit the roof. She ast it; and she's got to have it, though she's been dead more than ten years now. As for you and me, it can't make much difference. We've brought her up the best we knew this far."

"Well, you can't sell the Circle Arrow now," says I, "and I'll tell you why."

"Tell me," says he.

"Well, let's figure on it," says I. "It'll take anyways four years to develop Bonnie Bell ready to turn off the range, according to the way such things run. She'll have to go to school for at least four years. Why not let the thing run like it lays till then, while you send her East?"

"You mean to some girls' college?" says he. "Well, I've been thinking that all out. She'll have to go to the same kind of schools her ma did and be made a lady of, like her ma." He looks a little more cheerful and says to me: "That'll put it off four years anyways, won't it?"

"Shore it will," says I. "Maybe something will happen by that time. It don't stand to reason that them syndicate people will be as foolish four years from now as they are today; and like enough you can't sell the range then nohow." That makes us both feel a lot cheerfuller.

Well, later on him and me begun looking up in books what was the best college for girls, though none of 'em said anything about caring special for girls that knew more of horses and cows than anything else.

We seen names of plenty of schools — Vassar and Ogontz and Bryn Mawr — but we couldn't pronounce them names; so we voted against them all. At last I found one that looked all right — it was named Smith.

"Here's the place!" says I to Old Man Wright; and I showed him on the page. "This man Smith sounds like he had some horse sense. Let's send Bonnie Bell to Old Man Smith and see what he'll do with her."

Well, we done that. Old Man Smith must of knew his business pretty well, for what he done with Bonnie Bell was considerable. She was changed when she got back to us the first time, come summer of the first year. I didn't get East and I never did meet up with Old Man Smith at all; but I say he must of knowed his business. His catalogue said his line was to make girls appreciate the Better Things of life. He spelled Better Things in big letters. Well, I don't know whether Bonnie Bell begun to hanker after them Better Things or not, but she was changed after that every year more and more when she come home. In four years she wasn't the same girl.

She wasn't spoiled — you couldn't spoil her noways. She was as much tickled as ever with the colts and the calves and the chickens and the alfalfa and the mountains; and she could still ride anything they brought along, and she hadn't forgot how to rope. Still, she was different. Her clothes was different. Her hats was different. Her shoes was different. Her hair was done up different. Somehow she had grew up less like her pa and more like her ma. So then I seen that 'bout the worst had happened to him and me that could happen. Them Better Things was not such as growed in Wyoming.

Now, Old Man Wright and me, us two, had brought up the kid. Me being foreman, that was part of my business too. We been busy. I could see we was going to be a lot busier. Before long something was due to pop. At last the old man comes to me once more.

" Curly," says he, " I was in hopes something would happen, so that this range of ours wouldn't be no temptation to them irrigation colonizers; I was hoping something would happen to them, so they would lose their money. But they lost their minds instead. These last four years they raised their bid on the Circle Arrow a half million dollars every year. They've offered me more money than there is in the whole wide world. They say now that for the brand and the range stock and the home ranch, and all the hay lands and ditches that we put in so long ago, they'll give me three million eight hundred thousand dollars, a third of it in real money and the rest secured on the place. What do you think of that? "

" I think somebody has been drunk," says I.

"There ain't that much money at all. I remember seeing Miss Anderson, Bonnie Bell's teacher down at Meeteetse, make a million dollars on the blackboard, and it reached clear acrost it — six ciphers, with a figure in front of it. And that was only one million dollars. When you come to talking nearly four million dollars — why, there ain't that much money. They're fooling you, Colonel."

"I wisht they was," says he, sighing; "but the agent keeps pestering me. He says they'll make it four million flat or maybe more if I'll just let go. You see, Curly, we picked the ground mighty well years ago, and them ditches we let in from the mountains for the stock years ago is what they got their eyes on now. They say that folks can dry-farm the benches up toward the mountains — they can't, and I don't like to see nobody try it. I'm a cowman and I don't like to see the range used for nothing else. But what am I going to do?"

"Well, what are you going to do, Colonel?" says I. "I know what you'll do, but I'll just ast you."

"Of course," says he, "it ain't in my heart to sell the Circle Arrow — you know that — but I got to. Here's Bonnie Bell. She's finished — that is to say, she ain't finished, but just beginning. She's at the limit of what the range will produce for her right now. We got to move on."

I nodded to him. We both felt the same about it. It wasn't so much what happened to us.

"Well," says he, "we got to pick out a place for her to live at after we sell the range. I thought of St. Louis; but it's too hot, and I never liked the market there. Kansas City is a good cowtown; but it ain't as good as Chicago. I reckon Chicago maybe is as good a cowtown as there is."

"Well, Colonel," says I, "I reckon here's where I go West."

"You go where?" says he to me, sharp.

"West," says I.

"There ain't no West," says he. "Besides, what do you mean? What are you talking about, going anywheres?"

"You said you was going to sell the range," says I. "That ends my work, don't it? I filed on eight or ten homesteads, and so did the other boys. It's all surveyed and patented, and it's yours to sell."

He didn't say nothing for a while, his Adam's apple walking up and down his neck.

"You been square to me all your life, Colonel," says I, "and I can't kick. All cowpunchers has to be turned out to grass sometime and it's been a long time coming for me. I'm as old as you are, Colonel, and I can't complain."

"Curly," says he, "what you're saying cuts me a little more than anything ever did happen to me. Ain't I always done right by you?"

"Of course you have, Colonel. Who said you hadn't?"

"Ain't you always been square with me?"

"Best I knew how," says I. "I never let my right hand know what my left was doing with a running iron — and I was left-handed."

"That's right; you helped me get my start in the early days. I owe a lot to you — a lot more than I've ever paid; but the least I could do for you would be to give you a home and a place at my table as long as ever you live, and more wages than you're worth — ain't that the truth?"

"I don't know how you figure that," says I.

"Yes; you do, too, know how I figure that — you know there ain't but one way I could figure it. You stay with me till hell freezes under both of us; and I don't want to hear no more talk about you going West or nowheres else."

Folkses' Adam's apples bothers sometimes.

"We built this brand together," says he, "and what right you got to shake it now?" says he; me not being able now to talk much. "We rode this range, every foot of it, together, and more than once slept under the same saddle blanket. I've trusted you to tally a thousand head of steers for me a half dozen times a year. You've had the spring rodeo in your hands ever since I can remember. You've been one-half pa of that kid. Has times changed so much that you got a right to talk the way you're talking?"

"You're going back into the States, though, Colonel," says I. "They turn men out there when they're forty — and I'll never see forty again. I read in the papers that forty is the dead line back there."

"It ain't in Wyoming," says he.

"We won't be in Wyoming no more, there," says I.

He set and looked off across the range toward the Gunsight Gap, at the head of the river, and I could see him get white under his freckles. He was game, but he was scared.

"We can't help it, Curly," says he. "We've raised the girl between us and we've got to stick all the way through. You've been my foreman here and you got to be my foreman there in the city. We'll land there with a few million dollars or so and I reckon we'll learn the game after a while."

"I'd make a hell of a vallay, wouldn't I, Colonel?" says I.

"I didn't ast you to be no vallay for me," says he. "I ast you to be my foreman — you know damn well what I mean."

I did know, too, far as that's concerned, and I thought more of Old Man Wright then than I ever did.

Of course it's hard for men to talk much out on the range, and we didn't talk. We only set for quite a while, with our knees up, breaking sticks and looking off at the Gunsight Gap, on top of the range — just as if we hadn't saw it there any day these past forty years.

I was plenty scared about this new move and so was he. It's just like riding into a ford where the water is stained with snow or mud and running high, and where there ain't no low bank on the other side. You don't know how it is, but you have to chance it. It looked bad to me and it did to him; but we had rid into such places before together and we both knew we had to do it now.

"Colonel," says I at last to him, "I don't like it none, but I got to go through with you if you want me to."

He sort of hit the side of my knee with the back of his hand, like he said: "It's a trade." And it was a trade.

That's how come us to move from Wyoming to Chicago, looking for some of them Better Things.

II

WHERE WE THREW IN

"WELL, Curly," says Old Man Wright to me one day a couple of months after we had our first talk, "I done it!"

"You sold her?" says I.

"Yes," says he.

"How much did you set 'em back, Colonel?" says I; and he says they give him a million and a half down, or something like that, and the balance of four million and a quarter deferred, one, two, three.

That's more money than all Wyoming is worth, let alone the Yellow Bull Valley, which we own.

"That's a good deal of money deferred, ain't it, Colonel?" says I.

"Well, I don't blame 'em," he says. "If I had to pay anybody three or four million dollars I'd defer it as long as I could. Besides, I'm thinking they'll defer it more than one, two and three years if they wait for them grangers to pay 'em back their money with what they can raise.

"But ain't it funny how you and me made all that money? It's a proof of what industry and economy can do when they can't help theirselfs. When Tug Patterson wished this range on me forty years ago I hated him sinful. Yet we run the ditches in from year to year, gradual, and here we are!

"Well, now," he goes on, "they want possession right away. We got to pull our freight. You and me, Curly, we ain't got no home no more."

That was the truth. In three weeks we was on our way, turned out in the world like orphans. Still, Old Man Wright he just couldn't bear to leave without one more whirl with the boys down at the Cheyenne Club. He was gone down there several days; and when he come back he was hungry, but not thirsty.

"It's no use, Curly," says he. "It's my weakness and I shore deplore it; but I can't seem to get the better of my ways."

"How much did you lose, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Lose?" says he. "I didn't lose nothing. I win four sections of land and five hundred cows. I didn't go to do it and I'm sorry; because, what am I going to do with them cows?"

"Deed 'em to Bonnie Bell," says I. "Trust 'em out to some square fellow you know on shares. We may need 'em for a stake sometime."

"That's a good idea," says he. "Not that I'm scared none of going broke. Money comes to me — I can't seem to shoo it away."

"I never had so much trouble," says I, "but if you're feeling liberal give me a chaw of tobacco and let's talk things over."

We done that, and we both admitted we was scared to leave Wyoming and go to Chicago. We had to make our break though.

Bonnie Bell was plumb happy. She kept on telling her pa about the things she was going to do when she got to the city. She told him that, so far as she was concerned, she'd never of left the range; but since he wanted to go East and insisted so, why, she was game to go along. And he nods all the time while she talks that way to him — him aching inside.

We didn't know any more than a rabbit where to go when we got to Chicago; but Bonnie Bell took charge of us. We put up in the best hotel there was, one that looks out over the lake and where it costs you a dollar every time you turn round. The bell-hops used to give us the laugh quiet at first, and when the manager come and sized us up he couldn't make us out till we told him a few things. Gradual, though, folks round that hotel began to take notice of us, especial Bonnie Bell. They found out, too, like enough, that Old Man Wright had more money than anybody in Chicago ever did have before — at least he acted like he had.

"Curly," says he to me one day, "I got to go and take out a new bank account. I can't write checks fast enough on one bank to keep up with Bonnie Bell," says he.

"What's she doing, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Everything," says he. "Buying new clothes and pictures, and lots of things. Besides, she's going to be building her house right soon."

"What's that?" I says.

"Her house. She's bought some land up there on the Lake Front, north of one of them parks; it lays right on the water and you can see out across the lake. She's picked a good range. If we had all that water out in Wyoming we could do some business with it, though here it's a waste — only just to look at.

"She's got a man drawing plans for her new house, Curly — she says we've got to get it done this year. That girl shore is a hustler! Account of them things, you can easy see it's time for me to go and fix things up with a new bank."

So we go to the bank he has his eye on, about the biggest and coldest one in town — good place to keep butter and aigs; and we got in line with some of these Chicago people that are always in a hurry, they don't know why. We come up to where there is a row of people behind bars, like a jail. The jail keepers they set outside at glass-top tables, looking suspicious as any case keeper in a faro game. They all looked like Sunday-school folks. I felt uneasy.

Old Man Wright he steps up to one of the tables where a fellow is setting with eyeglasses and chin whiskers — oldish sort of man; and you knowed he looked older than he was. He didn't please me. He sizes us up. We was still wearing the clothes we bought in Cheyenne at the Golden Eagle, which we thought was good enough; but this man, all he says to us was:

"What can I do for you, my good people?"

"I don't know just what," says Old Man Wright, "but I want to open a account."

"Third desk to the right," says he.

So we went down three desks and braced another man to see if we please could put some money in his bank. This one had whiskers parted in the middle on his chin. I shore hated him.

"What can I do for you, my good man?" says he.

"I was thinking of opening a account," says Old Man Wright.

"What business?" says he.

"Poker and cows," says Old Man Wright.

The fellow with whiskers turned away.

"I'm very busy," says he.

"So am I," says Old Man Wright. "But what about the account?"

"You'd better see Mr. Watts, three windows down," says the man with the whiskers. So we went on a little farther down.

"How much of a deposit did you want to make, my good friend?" ast this new man, who had little whiskers in front of his ears. I didn't like him none at all.

Old Man Wright he puts his hand in his pocket and pulls out a lot of fine cut, and some keys and a knife and some paper money, and says he:

"I don't know — it might run as high as three hundred dollars."

The man with the little whiskers he pushes back his roll.

"We couldn't think of opening so small a account," says he. "I recommend you to our Savings Department, two floors below."

Old Man Wright he turns to me and says he:

"Haven't they got the fine system? They always have a place for your money, even if it's a little bit."

"Hold on a minute," says he after a while and pulls a card out of his pocket. "Take this in to your president and tell him I want to see him."

That made the man with the little whiskers get right pale. His mouth got round like that of a sucker fish.

"What do you mean?" says he.

"Nothing much," says Old Man Wright. "I may have overlooked a few things. I was wrong about that three hundred dollars."

He flattens out on the table a mussed-up piece of paper he found in his side pocket.

"It wasn't three hundred dollars at all, but three hundred thousand dollars," says he. "I forgot. Go ask your president if he'll please let me open a account, especial since I bought four thousand shares in this bank the other day when I was absent-minded — my banker out in Cheyenne told me to do it. You can see why I come in, then — I wanted to see how the hands in this business was carrying it on, me being a stockholder. Now run along, son," says he, "and bring the president out here, because I'm busy and I ain't got long to wait."

And blame me if the president didn't come out, too, after a while! He was a little man, yet looked like he'd just got his suit of clothes from the tailor that morning, and his necktie too — white and rather soft-looking; not very tall, but wide, with no whiskers. I didn't have no use for him at all.

The president he came smiling, with both his hands out. He certainly was a glad-hand artist, which is what a bank president has to be today — he's got to be a speaker and a handshaker. The rest don't count so much.

He taken us into his own room. I never had knowed that chairs growed so large before or any table so long; but we set down. That president certainly knew good cigars.

"My dear Mr. Wright," says he, "I'm profoundly glad that you have at last came in to see us. I knew of your purchase in our institution and we value your association beyond words. With the extent of your holdings — which perhaps you will increase — you clearly will be entitled to a place on our board of directors. I'm a Western man myself — I came from Moline, Illinoy; and perhaps it will not be too much if I ask you to let me have your proxy, just as a matter of form." He talks like a book.

We had some more conversation, and when we went out all the case keepers stood up and bowed, one after the other. We didn't seem to have no trouble opening a account after that.

"The stock in this bank's too low," says Old Man Wright to me on the side. "That's why I bought it. They're going to put it up after a while; and when they start to put things up they put 'em farther when you begin on the ground floor. Do you see?"

I begun to think maybe Old Man Wright was something more than a cowman, but I didn't say nothing. We went back to the hotel and he calls in Bonnie Bell to our room.

"Look at me, sis," says he. "Is they anything wrong with me?"

She sits down on his knee and pushes back his hair.

"Why, you old dear," says she, "of course they ain't."

"Is they anything wrong with my clothes or Curly's?" he says.

"Well now ——" she begins.

"That settles it!" says he; and that afternoon him and me went down to a tailor.

What he done to each of us was several suits of clothes. Old Man Wright said he wanted one suit each of every kind of clothes that anybody ever had been knew to wear in the history of the world. I was more moderate. I never was in a spiketail in my whole life and I told him I'd die first. Still, I could see I was going to be made over considerable.

As for Bonnie Bell, when she went down the avenue, where the wind blows mostly all the time, she looked like she'd lived there in the city all her life. She always had a good color in her cheeks from living out-of-doors and riding so much, and she was right limber and sort of thin. Her hat was sort of little and put some on one side. Her shoes was part white and part black, the way they wore 'em then, and her stockings was the color of her dress; and her dress was right in line, like the things you saw along in the store windows

It was winter when we hit Chicago and she wore furs — dark ones — and her muff was shore stylish. When she put it up to the side of her face to keep off the wind she was so easy to look at that a good many people would turn round and look at her. I don't know what folks thought of her pa and me, but Bonnie Bell didn't look like she'd come from Wyoming. Once two young fellows followed her clear to the door of the hotel, where they met me. They went away right soon after that.

Bonnie Bell just moved into Chicago like it was easy for her. As for Old Man Wright, about all him and me could do was to go down to the stockyards and see where the beef was coming from. We looked for some of our brand, and when he seen some of the Circle Arrow cows come in he wouldn't hardly talk to anybody for two or three days.

I never did see where Bonnie Bell's new house was, because she said it was a secret from me. Her pa told me that he paid round two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for the land, without no house on it.

"Why, at that," says I, "you'll be putting up a house there that'll cost over six thousand dollars, like enough!"

Bonnie Bell hears me and says she:

"I shouldn't wonder a bit if it would cost even more than that. Anybody that is somebody has to have a good house, here in Chicago."

"Are we somebody, sis?" says Old Man Wright, sudden.

"Dear old dad!" says she, and she kisses him some more. "We'll be somebody before we quit this game — believe me!"

"Curly," says the old man to me soon after, "that girl's got looks — Lord! I didn't know it till I seen her all dressed up the way she is here. She's got class — I don't know where she got it, but she has. She's got brains — Lord knows where she got them; certain not from me. She's got sand too — you can't stop her noways on earth. If she starts she's going through. And she says she only come here because she knew I wanted to!" says he.

"What's the difference?" I ast him. "We fooled her, didn't we?"

"Maybe," says he. "I ain't shore."

Well, anyway, this is what we'd swapped the old days out on the Yellow Bull for. We'd done traded the mountains and the valley and the things we knew for this three or four rooms at several hundred dollars a month in a hotel that looked out over the water, and over a lot of people on the keen lope, not one of them caring a damn for us — leastways not for her pa or me.

III

US LIVING IN TOWN

I NEVER had lived in town this long, not in all my life before, and, far as I know, the boss hadn't, neither. We wasn't used to this way of living. We'd been used to riding some every day. Out in the parks, even in the winter, once in a while you could see somebody riding — or thinking they was riding, which they wasn't.

One day Old Man Wright, come spring, he goes down to the stockyards and buys a good saddle horse for Bonnie Bell to ride. It cost him twenty-five dollars a month to keep that horse, so he would eat his head off in about three months at the outside. Old Man Wright tells me that I'll have to ride out with the kid whenever she wanted to go. That suited me. Of course that meant we had to buy another horse for me. That made the stable bill fifty dollars a month. I never did know what we paid for our rooms at the hotel, but it was more every month than would keep a family a year in Wyoming.

Bonnie Bell she could ride a man's saddle all right, and she had a outfit for it. When it got a little warmer in the spring we used to go in the parks every once in a while. One day we rid on out into a narrow sort of place along the lake. There was houses there — a row of them, all big, all of stone or brick; houses as big as the penitentiary in Wyoming and about as cheerful.

We stopped right in front of a big brick-and-stone house, which had trees and flower beds and hedges all along; and says she:

"Curly, how would you like to live in a house like that?"

"I wouldn't live in the damn place if you give it to me, Bonnie Bell," says I, cheerful.

She looked at me kind of funny.

"That's the kind of a house the best people have in this town," says she. "For instance, that house we're looking at looks as though the best architects in town had designed it. That place, Curly, cost anywhere from a half to three-quarters of a million, I'll betcha."

"Well, that's a heap more money than anybody ought to pay for a place to live in," says I. "They ought to spend it for cows."

"But it fronts the lake," says she, "and it's right in with the best people."

"Is that so?" says I. "Then here is where we ought to of come — some place like that; for what we're here for is to break in with the best people. Ain't that the truth, Bonnie Bell?"

"Maybe," says she after a while—"bankers, I suppose, merchants, wholesale people—hides, leather, packing ——"

"And not cowmen?" says I.

"Certainly not!" says she. "To be the best people you must deal in something that somebody else has worked on—you must handle a manufactured product of some kind. You mustn't be a producer of actual wealth."

"Sho! Bonnie Bell," says I, "if you're in earnest you're talking something you learned at Old Man Smith's college. I don't know nothing about them things. Folks is folks, ain't they? A square man is a square man, no matter what's his business."

"It's different here," says she.

"Well, now, while we're speaking about houses," says I, us setting there on our horses all the time and plenty of people going by and looking at us—or leastways looking at her—"why don't you tell me where your house is going to be at? You never did show it to me once."

"I'm not going to, Curly," says she. "That's going to be a secret. Of course dad knows where it is; but as for you—well, maybe we will get into it by Christmas."

"Now, for instance," says I — and I waves my hand toward a place that was just starting alongside this big house we'd been looking at —" it like enough taken a year or so to get this here place as far along as it is."

"Uh-huh!" says she.

So then we turned away and rid back home. When we got back to the hotel we found Old Man Wright setting in a chair, with his legs stuck out and his hands in his pockets, looking plumb unhappy.

"What's the matter, dad?" ast Bonnie Bell. "Have you lost any money or heard any bad news?"

"No, I ain't," says he. "It all depends on what people need to make them happy."

"Well," says Bonnie Bell — her face was right red from the ride we had and she was feeling fine —" I'm perfectly happy, except there ain't any place you can ride a horse in this town and have any fun at it, the roads are so hard. Everybody seems to go in motor cars nowadays, anyways."

"Huh!" says her pa. "That's what I should think." He holds up a newspaper in front of him. "When I first come here," says he, "I seen that everybody was riding in cars, and I figured that more of them was going to; so I taken a flyer, sixty thousand dollars or so, in some stock in a company that was making one of them cars that sells right cheap. Now them people have gave me eighty per cent stock for a bonus and raised the dividend to twenty-five per cent a year. She's going to make money all right. Shouldn't wonder if that stock would more than double in a year or so."

"For heaven's sake, Colonel," says I, "ain't there nothing a-tall that you can get into without making money?" says I.

"No, there ain't," says he, sad. "It happens that way with some folks — I just can't help making it; yet here I am with more money than any of us ought to have. But I had to do it," says he to Bonnie Bell. "I get sort of lonesome, not having much to do; so that I have to mix up with something. Cars, sis?" says he. "Why, let me give you two or three of the kind our company makes."

"No you don't!" says Bonnie Bell. "I want one that ——"

"Huh! that costs about eight or ten thousand dollars, maybe?"

"Well," says she, "you have to sort of play things proportionate, dad; and I think that kind of a car is just about proportionate to what you and me is going to do in this little town when we get started."

She turns and looks out the window some more. That was a way she had. You see, all these months we'd been there already we didn't know a soul in that town. Womenfolks always hate each other, but they hate theirselves when other womenfolks don't pay no attention to them. Bonnie Bell was used to neighbors and she didn't have none here; so, though she was busy buying everything a girl couldn't possibly want, she didn't seem none too happy now.

"What's wrong, sis?" says her pa after a while, pulling her over on his knee. "Ain't me and Curly treating you all right?"

She pushed back his face from her and looks at him; and says she, right sober:

"Dad," she says, "you mustn't ever really ask me that. You're the best man in all the world — and so is Curly."

"No, we ain't," says he. "The best man hasn't really showed yet for you, sis."

"Why, dad," says she, "I'm only a young girl!"

"You're the finest-looking young girl in this town," says he, "and the town knows it."

"Huh!" says she, and sniffs up her nose. "It don't act much like it."

"If I can believe my eyes," says her pa, "when I walk out with you a good many people seem to know it."

"That don't count, dad," says she. "Men, and even women, look at a girl on the street — men at her ankles and women at her clothes; but that doesn't mean anything. That doesn't get you anywhere. That isn't being anybody. That doesn't mean that you are one of the best people."

"And you want to be one of the best people — is that it, sis?"

She set her teeth together and her eyes got bright.

"Well," says she, "we never played anything for pikers, did we, dad?"

Then them two looked each other in the eyes. I looked at them both. To me it seemed there certainly was going to be some doings.

"Go to it, sis!" says her pa. "You've got your own bank account and it's bigger than mine. The limit's the roof.

"Speaking of limits," says he, "reminds me that the president of our bank he got me elected to the National League Club here in town; him having such a pull he done it right soon — proxies, maybe. I've been over there this afternoon trying to enjoy myself. Didn't know anybody on earth. One or two folks finally did allow me to set in a poker game with them when I ast. It wasn't poker, but only a imitation. I won two hundred and fifty dollars and it broke up the game. If a fellow pushes in half a stack of blues over there they all tremble and get pale. This may be a good town for women, but, believe me, sis, it's no town for a real man."

"Well, never mind, dad," says she. "If you get lonesome I'll have you help me on the house. We'll have to get our servants together. For instance, we've got to have a butler — and a good one."

"What's a butler?" says I.

"He stands back of your chair and makes you feel creepy," says Old Man Wright. "We've got to have one of them things, shore. Then there's the chauffore for the car when you get it, and the cook. That's about all, ain't it?"

"That's about the beginning," says Bonnie Bell. "You have to have a cook and a kitchen girl and two first-floor maids and two upper-floor maids and a footman."

"Well, that will help some," says her pa. "I've been bored a good deal and lonesome, but maybe, living with all them folks, somebody will start something sometime. When did you say we could get in?"

"They tell me we'll be lucky if we have everything ready by Christmas," says Bonnie Bell.

"It looks like a merry summer, don't it?" says he sighing.

"And like a hell of a Merry Christmas!" says I.

IV

US AND CHRISTMAS EVE

HOW we spent all that spring and summer I don't hardly see now. We was the lonesomest people you ever seen. Old Man Wright he'd go over to his new club once in a while and sometimes out to the stockyards, and sometimes he'd fuss round at this or that. Bonnie Bell and me we'd go riding once in a while when she wasn't busy, which was most of the time now. She had a lot of talking to do with the folks that was building her house and furnishing it — she never would tell me where it was.

Well, it got cold right early in the winter. It was awful cold, colder than it gets in Wyoming. When it gets cold in Chicago the folks say: "This certainly is most unusual weather!" — just like we do when there is a blizzard out in Wyoming. Old Man Wright and me we thought we'd freeze, because, you see, we had to wear overcoats like they had in the city, and couldn't wear no sheep-lined coats like we would have wore on the range.

"Well, you see," said Bonnie Bell when we complained to her, "when we get our motor car running we won't have to walk. Nobody that amounts to anything walks in the city. Our best people all have cars; so they don't need sheepskin coats. Our car will be here any time now; so we can see more of the city and be more comfortable than you can on horseback. Nobody rides horseback except a few young people in the parks in the summertime — I found that out."

"Don't our best people do that now?" ast her pa.

"Some, but not many," says she. "There's a good many people that wants you to think they're the best people; but they ain't. You can always tell them by the way they play their hands. Most of the people I've seen riding in the parks is that sort — they want you to look at them when they ride because they're perfectly sure they're doing what our best people are doing. You can tell 'em by their clothes, whether they are riding or walking. It's easy to spot them out."

"I wonder," says I, "if they can spot out your pa and me?"

She comes over and rumples up my hair like she sometimes did.

"You're a dear, Curly!" says she.

"I know that," says I; "but don't muss up my new necktie, for I worked about a hour on that this morning, and at that it's a little on one side and some low. But I'm coming on," says I.

Now, Old Man Wright, when he wore his spiketail coat, he had the same trouble with his tie that I had with mine. He told his tailor about that one time, but his tailor told him that the best people wore them that way — mussed up and careless. Natural like it was a hard game to play, because how could you tell when to be careless and when not to be? But, as I said, we was coming on.

Mr. Henderson — he was the hotel manager and a pretty good sport too — he sort of struck up a friendship with Old Man Wright, and you couldn't hardly say we didn't have no visitors, for he come in every once in a while and was right nice to us. You see, what with Old Man Wright wearing his necktie careless and Bonnie Bell dressing exactly like she come out of a fashion paper, if it hadn't been for me our outfit might of got by for being best people, all right. Like enough I queered the game some; but Henderson he didn't seem to mind even me.

The day before Christmas Bonnie Bell said her new house was all done and all furnished, everything in, servants and all, ready for us to move in that very night and spend Christmas Eve there. But she says Mr. Henderson, the manager of the hotel, wanted us to eat our last dinner that night in the hotel before we went home. To oblige him we done so.

He taken us in hisself that night. The man at the door snatched our hats away, but he taken Bonnie Bell's coat — fur-lined it was and cost a couple of thousand dollars — over his arm, and he held back the chair for her. There was flowers on the table a plenty. I reckon he fixed it up. There wasn't no ham shank and greens, but there was everything else.

I shouldn't wonder if some of the best people was there. Everybody had on the kind of clothes they wear in the evening in a town like this — spiketails for the men, and silk things, low, for the womenfolks. Old Man Wright, with his red moustache, a little gray, him tall, but not fat, and his necktie a little mussed up, was just as good-looking a man as was in the place.

As for Bonnie Bell — well, I looked at our girl as I set there in my own best clothes and my necktie tied the best I knew how, and, honest, she was so pretty I was scared. The fact is, pretty ain't just the word. She was more than that — she was beautiful.

Her dress was some sort of soft green silk, I reckon, cut low, and her neck was high and white, and her hair was done up high behind and tied up somehow, and her chin was held up high. She had some color in her face — honest color — and her eyes was big and bright. Her arms was bare up above where her gloves come to. She didn't have on very many rings — though, Lord! if she wanted them she could of had a bushel. She didn't have on much jewelry nowhere;

but I want to tell you everybody in that room looked at her all they dared.

I looked at her and so did her pa. I don't know as you could say we both was proud — that ain't the right word for it. We was both scared. It didn't seem possible she could be ours. It didn't seem possible that us two old cowmen had raised her that way out on the range and that she had changed so soon. She must of had it in her — her ma, I reckon.

There was a table not very far from ours, just across the first window, where there was a old man and a old woman and a young man. They seen us all right. I seen the young man looking at Bonnie Bell two or three times, always looking down when he seen I noticed. He was a good-looking young man and dressed well, I suppose, for all the men was dressed alike. His necktie was tied kind of mussy and careless, like Old Man Wright's, and he didn't have to keep pushing at his shirt. Did Bonnie Bell notice him? Maybe she did — you can't tell about women-folks; their eyes is set on like a antelope's and they can see behind theirself.

"That's Old Man Wisner," says Henderson, the hotel manager, quiet, to us, leaning over and pretending like he was fixing our flowers some more. "Mrs. Wisner and young Mr. James Wisner are with him. You know, he is one of the richest men here in Chicago — packing and banking, and all that sort of thing. They are among our best people. They live up in Millionaire Row."

"Yes, I know," says Bonnie Bell.

From where I set I could see them Wisners over at the other table. The old man was big, with gray whiskers and gray hair, rather coarse. He had big eyebrows and his eyes was kind of cross-looking, like his stomach wasn't right. He was a portly sort of man — you've seen that kind. Some is bankers and some packers and some brewers; they all look alike, no matter what they are. They can't ride or walk.

This old party he didn't seem to be paying much attention to his wife, and I don't know as I blame him. She may have had some looks once, but not recent. They wasn't happy.

After a while the folks at that table got up and went on out before we was done with our dinner, which was going strong at the end of a couple of hours — there wasn't anything in the whole wide world we didn't have to eat except ham shank and greens. At that, we had a right good time.

By and by it got to be maybe eleven o'clock, and Bonnie Bell turns down her long white gloves, which she had tucked the hands of them back into the wrists.

"Shall I call your car, Mr. Wright?" ast the manager, Mr. Henderson.

"I don't know," says Old Man Wright. "Have we got a car, sis?"

"Yes, papa," says she — she mostly said "papa" when folks was round; don't overlook it that Old Man Smith turned out girls with real class. She didn't talk like her pa and me neither.

"Yes, papa," says she now. "I was going to surprise you about our car; it's been on hand for a week. I employed a driver and told him to be ready for us about now." You see all our things had gone out to the new house.

We all three of us helped Bonnie Bell on with her coat. She picked up her muff and we all went out. I don't think any man in the place that had brass buttons forgot that Christmas Eve.

The tall man in front at the door, like a drum major in a band, he knew us well enough by now; he opens the door for us and we stand there, looking out.

I said it was cold in Chicago and it was shore cold that night. It was snowing — snow coming in off the lake slantwise, like a blizzard on the plains. You couldn't hardly see across the walk. Out beyond the awning, which covered the sidewalk, we could see our new car — a long, shiny one with lights inside and lamps all over it, red, white and blue, or maybe green. There was a couple of men on the front seat outside — I don't know when the kid had hired them. They was both wrapped up in big fur overcoats, which they certainly did need that night, since they couldn't ride in the e-limousine, like us.

Bonnie Bell walks across the sidewalk now, under the awning, with her muff up against her face, bending over against the storm. She looks up, after she has said good-by to Mr. Henderson, who run out with us, laughing and saying "Merry Christmas!"— she just looks up at the man on the seat, and says she: "Home, James!"

I reckon the man must of been new that she had hired. He looks round at first, as if he was trying to read our brand. Then all at once, sudden, he jumps down offen the seat, touches his cap and opens the door.

We all got in and said good-by to the hotel where we'd been living so long. The chauffore touches his hat again, shuts the door and climbs back in his seat. He turned that long car round in one motion in the street. The next minute we was out on the avenue, away from the hotel, and right in the middle of that row of lights several miles long, where the bullyvard is at, along the lake there. He turns her north on the bullyvard, without a skip or a bobble, and she runs smooth as grease. I seen Bonnie Bell was certainly a good judge of a car, like she was of a horse or anything else.

"Daughter," says Old Man Wright to her after a time — and he didn't usual call her that —"you're a wonder to your dad tonight! Where did you get it? Where did you learn it?"

She looks up at him quick from her muff, plumb serious, and just put out her hand on his, in its white glove.

We moved right along up the avenue, along a little crooked street or so, round a corner and over the bridge; and then we come out where the lights was in a long row again, and we could hear the roar of the lake right close to the road.

"Where are you taking us, kid?" says I after a while, seeing that her pa wasn't going to say nothing nohow.

She only smiled.

"Wait, Curly; you'll see the new ranch house before so very long."

By and by we was right at the lower end of that long row of big houses that cost so much money, where the best people live — Millionaire Row, they called it then.

I knew where we was. After a while we come right to the place where Bonnie Bell and me once had set on our horses and looked out at a new house that wasn't finished, but was just beginning. It was done now — all complete, from top to bottom, right where the foundations had been last spring! I could see where the walks was laid out and some trees had been planted that fall — big ones, as though they had always growed there. Here and there was statues, women mostly and looking cold that night.

On behind you could see the line of the low buildings, like the outlying barns of the home ranch on the Yellow Bull; but this house stood there just inside, where the lake come in rolling and roaring, and fronted right on this avenue, where our best people lived. It was stone, three stories or more, maybe, with a place for buckboards to drive under and a stone porch over the front door, and a walk and steps. And it was all lit up from top to bottom; all the windows was bright.

We wasn't cold or wet or tired, us three, but we wasn't feeling good — not one of us. Now when we stopped there for some reason and looked at all them red lights shining, I sort of felt a wish that I could see a light shining in some home ranch once more, like I had so often out on the Yellow Bull. I set there looking at that place, all lit up for somebody, all waiting for somebody; and for a time I forgot where I was — forgot even that the car had stopped.

I turns round; and there was Bonnie Bell pulling her coat up round her neck and fixing her hands in her muff, and her pa was buttoning up his coat. Just then, too, I seen the chauffore jump down offen the front seat. He comes round to the door, right where the walk was that led up to this new big house, and he opens the door and touches his hat, and stands there, waiting.

What with their laughing and pulling at me, and me sort of hanging back, we kind of forgot it was Christmas Eve. Old Man Wright thought of it, sudden; and he turns back to the man, who still stood at the door looking after Bonnie Bell and us as though we'd forgot something. He puts his hand in his waistcoat pocket and hauls out a ten-dollar gold piece, and puts it into the hand of this new chauffore of ours.

"Here you go, son," says he. "Merry Christmas! And I hope you'll take good care of my daughter."

The new chauffore, standing there in the snow — he was tall and a right good-looking chap too — he touches his cap.

"Thank you, sir," says he.

I seen the car move on away. It didn't turn in at our alley, but went on to the next gate, because our road wasn't quite finished yet. A minute afterward Bonnie Bell had me inside the door in the hall and was kissing us both, right in front of a sad-looking man in clothes like ours.

We stood for just a minute near the big door, and before we got it shut she looked out once more into the night, with the lights shining all through the snow, and the trees looking white and thin in the drift.

"Call the chauffore in and have him get a drink," says Old Man Wright. "That was a cold ride."

But by this time he was gone; so we all turns back to wrastle with this sad man, who evident was intending to mix it with us.

V

US AND THE HOME RANCH

WHEN all three of us — Old Man Wright and Bonnie Bell and me — went inside the door of that big new house we stood there for a minute or so; and at first I thought we had got into the wrong place — especial since that sad man looked like he thought so too.

It was all lit up inside and you could see 'way back into the hall — little carpets of all sorts of colors laying round, and pictures on the wall, and a fire 'way on beyond somewhere in a grate. I never seen a hotel furnished better.

Old Man Wright was like a man that's won a elephant on a lottery ticket. Bonnie Bell looks at him and looks at me like she missed something. On the whole, I reckon we was the three lonesomest, scaredest, unhappiest people in all that big town — it was Christmas Eve too!

There was a lot of other people in a row standing down the hall, back of this sad man. He located us at last and began to help Old Man Wright take off his overcoat — and me too; but I wouldn't let him.

I wasn't sick or nothing. So we stood there a little while, dressed up and just come to our new home ranch.

"That will do, William," says Bonnie Bell to the sad man.

"Father," says she, and she leads him to the row of folks in the hall, "these are all our people that I have engaged. This is Mary, our cook; and Sarah, the first maid. Annette is going to be my maid."

Well, she went down the line and introduced us to a dozen of 'em, I reckon. I just barely did know enough not to shake hands. Some of 'em touched their foreheads and the girls bobbed. They didn't talk none and they didn't shake hands.

By now Bonnie Bell's maid had her coat over her arm and them two was starting upstairs.

"I'll be back in a minute, dad," says she. "William will take you and Curly into your room."

The sad man he walks off down the hall, us following, and we come to a place right in the center of the house — and he left us there. We stopped when we went through the door.

What do you know? Bonnie Bell had fitted up that room precisely like the big room in the old home ranch! All our old things was there — how she got them I never knew. There was the old table, with the pipes and papers on it, and tobacco scattered round, and bottles over on the shelf, and a bridle or so — just the same place all the way through. She even had the stones of the old fireplace brought on, one nicked, where Hank Henderson shot the cook once.

"Look-a-here, Curly," says Old Man Wright after a while.

He leads me over to the corner of the room, aside of the fireplace. Dang me, if there wasn't our two old saddles, wore slick and shiny! Old Man Wright stands there in his spiketail coat, and he runs his hand down that old stirrup leather a time or two; and for a little while he can't say nothing at all — me neither.

"Ain't she some girl, Curly?" says he after a while.

"She's the ace, Colonel," says I.

"Ain't a thing overlooked," says he, thoughtful, walking round the place, his hands in his pockets.

By and by he come up to half a bottle of corn whisky — the same one that had stood on the table out on the Circle Arrow. He picks it up and pours hisself out a drink, thoughtful, and shoves it over to me.

"Every little thing!" says he. "Not a thing left out! It's the same place. Gawd bless the girl, anyways! I don't think I could of stood it at all if she hadn't fixed up this room for you and me. I was just going to stampede."

"Well, Colonel," says I, "here's looking at you! I see we've got a place where we can come in and unbuckle. It makes it a heap easier. I wasn't happy none at all before now."

"She done it all herself," says her pa, setting his glass down and looking round the room once more. "I give her free hand. The architect had marked this place 'Den,' I reckon. Huh! I don't call it a den — I call it home, sweet home. If it wasn't for this room," says he, "this would be one hell of a Christmas, wouldn't it, Curly? But never mind; we're going to break into this town, or get awful good reasons why."

"You reckon we can, Colonel?" says I.

"Shore, we can!" says he. "We got to! Don't she want it?"

"For instance," says I, "what's the name of our neighbors over next door to us, you reckon?"

"That's where Old Man Wisner lives," says he, grinning. "Them was the folks that set over at the table that Henderson pointed out to us to-night. He's the biggest packer in Chicago, president or something in about all the banks and everything else — there ain't no better people than what the Wisners are. And don't we live right next door to 'em? Can you beat it? That's why the land cost so much.

"Wisner didn't want us to buy this place; he wanted to buy it hisself, but buy it cheap. It was him or me, and I got it. Still, when I want to be neighbor to a man I'm going to be a neighbor whether he likes it or not."

"You reckon they'll like us?" says I.

"They got to," says he.

We was standing up, our glasses in hand, looking out through the door down the hall to where things was all bright and shiny; and just then we heard Bonnie Bell come down the stairs and call out:

"Oo-hoo, dad!"

We raises our glasses to her when she come in the door. She had took off the clothes she wore down at the hotel and had on something light and loose, silk, better for wearing in the house. The house was all warm, too, and in our fireplace, the old smoky one, some logs was burning right cheerful.

It was a new sort of Christmas to us, but we lived it down. The next morning we all acted as much like kids as we could, which is all there is to any Christmas. My socks was full of candy, and Old Man Wright he had a Teddy bear in his — part ways anyhow. Then Bonnie Bell she give him a new gold watch with bells in it, and me a couple of pins for my necktie. I never could get 'em in right.

After a while we come down to breakfast. We was in a big room that faced toward the Wisners' and likewise toward the lake. I reckon you could see forty miles up and down from where we set eating. It was warm in the room, though there wasn't much fire, and we all felt comfortable.

You could see out our windows right over the lot of the Wisners'; we could see into their house same as they could see into ours. There was a garridge set back toward the lake, same as ours, about on the same line, and beyond that you could see a boathouse. They had trees in their yard like ours, but ours was almost as big, though just planted. You could see where our flower beds was laid out, and the lines of little green trees all set in close together. On beyond the Wisners' you could see a whole row of other houses, all big and fine like theirs and ours.

All the whole country was covered with snow that morning. The wind was still blowing and the lake coming in mighty rough; you could hear the noise of it through the windows. It looked mighty cold outside and it was cold. You can freeze to death respectable in Wyoming, but in Chicago you keep on freezing and don't freeze to death, but wish you would, you are that cold.

Well, like I said, it was warm in the big room where we et. Bonnie Bell had a couple of yellow canary birds which was able to set up and sing, which Old Man Wright said was almost more than he could do hisself. Breakfast come on a little at a time — you couldn't tell how much of it there was going to be; but it made good, though it didn't start out very strong. By and by it got round to ham and aigs, which made us feel better. I never tasted better coffee; it was better than anything we had on the Yellow Bull. Ours out there was mostly extract, in pound packages — beans, I think, maybe.

"How do you like our new house, dad?" says she.

"They can't beat it, Bonnie Bell," says he.

"Dad; dear old dad!" says she. "I'm so glad you like it. I done it all for you."

"How do you mean?" says he.

"Why, of course, you know what a sacrifice it was for me to come here and leave the old place! But I seen you wanted it. If I thought it wasn't all right I believe it would break my heart."

"I know it," says he. "I know what a sacrifice you made when you come here on my account. If anything comes out wrong for you because of that sacrifice it shore would break my heart. 'Button, button,' says he, 'who's got the sacrifice?' If you leave it to me I'd say it was Curly, and not neither of us. Forget it, sis, and have another warfle."

"How do you like the place, Curly?" says she to me.

"I never seen anything like it," says I. "Like enough you paid too much though. I bet you paid two or three thousand dollars for this land — you was fooling when you said over two hundred thousand; and there ain't enough of it to rope a cow on at that. You could have bought several sections of real land for the same money; and how many cows this here house cost there can't nobody figure."

About then I heard a noise out in the street. Four or five people — Dutch, maybe — was playing in a band out there in front of the Wisners'. A man come out and shooed 'em away. They stood out in front of our place then and kept on playing. It seems like you can't eat in Chicago without some one plays music around.

"Here; take 'em out some money, William," says Old Man Wright. "It's Christmas."

They played some more then, and every morning since. I always hated 'em and I reckon everybody else did along in there, but there didn't seem to be no way to run 'em off.

"Well," says Old Man Wright when we finished our breakfast, "what are we going to do today, sis?" says he. "It's good tracking snow, but there ain't nothing to track. There ain't no need to see how the hay's holding out or to wonder if the cows can break through the ice to get at water. There ain't no horses in the barns. We ain't got a single thing to do — not even feed the dogs."

Bonnie Bell was reading in the paper which William, the sad man, had put by our plates. Her eyes got kind of soft and wetlike.

"I'll tell you what we can do, dad," says she. "Look at this list of poor people here in town that ain't got no Christmas."

"I've got you, sis," says he. "William, go tell the driver to bring the big car round; and tell the cook to get several baskets, full of grub — we're going to have a little party."

Well, by and by the chauffore brought the car round in front and we went out; and William and the others loaded her up with baskets. The chauffore was looking kind of pale and shaky. He seemed to have something on his mind.

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir," says he, touching his hat to Old Man Wright. "I didn't mean to be late; but, you see, it was Christmas Eve ——"

"Why, that's all right," says Old Man Wright to him. "Don't mention it — Christmas is due to come once a year anyhow."

"I'll not let it occur again," says the chauffore, touching his hat again.

"What? Christmas?" says he. "You can't help it."

The man looked at him kind of funny. I knew then he'd been celebrating the night before, and I was right glad he hadn't begun to celebrate until he'd drove us home, for he was jerky yet.

Christmas is a time when folks ought to be happy. We wasn't happy none that day. I never seen before what it was to be real poor. Here in this town, where there is so much money, it seemed like there was hundreds and thousands of people hadn't saw a square meal in their whole lives. You couldn't hardly stand it to see 'em — at least I couldn't. We spent our day that way — our first Christmas in town — trying to feed all the hungry people there was; and we couldn't. It was the saddest Christmas I ever had in all my life.

That night Old Man Wright and me didn't stop to put on our regular eating clothes, as Bonnie Bell said we ought to, and we all set down in her dining-room for dinner, feeling kind of thoughtful and thinking of how many people wasn't going to get no such a dinner that night. As for us, we had plenty; and, believe me, there was something which filled a long-felt want for Old Man Wright and me. What do you think? Why, ham shank and greens!

"Sis," says her pa, "you certainly are thoughtful."

We could see out our windows over into the Wisners' windows — it seemed like they had forgot to pull down their blinds, same as we had. They didn't seem to be nobody at home, only one young man. He come in all by hisself, all dressed up, and there was three men waiting on him at the table. At length I calls attention to this, and Bonnie Bell turns her head and looks across.

" William," says she, " draw the blinds; and be more careful after this."

VI

US AND THEM BETTER THINGS

WELL, things rocked along this way and we got through the winter someways, though every once in a while I taken a cold along of being shut up so much. There wasn't nowhere to go and nothing to do except to read the papers and wish you was dead.

Old Man Wright couldn't stand it no more; so he goes downtown and rents him a fine large office in a big building, with long tables with glass on top, and big chairs, something like in a bank. He didn't put no business sign on the door — just his name: J. W. Wright.

I'm lazy enough for anybody, like any cowpuncher — I don't believe in working only in spots; but sometimes I'd get so tired of doing nothing at the house that I'd get the chauffore to take me down to Old Man Wright's office, where I felt more at home. Nobody never come in to see us once — not in three months. We didn't have no neighbors, and we begun to see that that was the truth. I couldn't understand it, for we'd never got caught at nothing.

"Colonel," says I one morning, "do you reckon they're holding our past up against us anyways?" says I. "We spend a awful lot of money, but what do we get for it? Not a soul has came in our new house. As for me, I know I ain't earning no salary."

"Don't worry about that, Curly," says he. "You're getting plenty of grub and a place to sleep, ain't you? I'm the one that ought to worry, because I can't hardly find nothing to do here except make a little money."

"Won't there nobody play cards or nothing?" Ain't there no sports in this town?" says I.

"Poker here is a mere name." He shakes his head. "If you push in a hundred before the draw you're guilty of manslaughter. But there is other ways of making money."

"How is the deferred payments on the Circle Arrow coming on?" says I.

"One come in, so far, interest and all," says he. "I wisht it hadn't. First thing I know, I'll be as rich as Old Man Wisner here. I see he wants to run for alderman up in that ward. Now I wonder what his game is there — it don't stand to reason he'd want to be a alderman now, unless there's something under it. You'd think he was trying to run the town and the whole world, too, wouldn't you?"

"I don't like that outfit," says I. "They ain't friendly. If a man don't neighbor with you, like enough he's stealing somewhere and don't want to be watched."

"That certainly is so," says he. "Still, I been busy enough for a while."

"The first thing you know," I says to him, "you'll lose your roll, and then where will we be?" But he only laughs at that.

"For instance," says he, "you see all them electric lights all over this town. I begun to study about them things when I first come here. There's a sort of little thing inside that they burn — carbon, they call it. I seen that everybody would keep their eyes on the light and not notice the carbon. But still they had to have carbon. I put a little into a company that made them things — not much; only a hundred thousand or so. Since then, what have they done? Why, they've turned in and gave me eighty per cent stock for nothing, and raised the cash dividend until I'm making twenty per cent on all I invested and what I didn't invest too. Such things bores me.

"Then again, there's my rubber business," says he, "rubber tires. The second day we owned the big car she busts a couple of tires — fifty dollars or so per each. I begun to figure out how many cars they was running in this town, up and down the avenue and all over all the other streets, each one of 'em with four tires on and any one of 'em liable to bust any minute. I figure the tires runs from fifteen to sixty dollars apiece and that somebody spends a lot of money for them. Then I went and bought into a good company that makes them things, a few months ago — not much; only a couple of hundred thousand or so. But what's the use?" He sets back and yawns, looking tired.

"I can't help it. I can't find no game in this country that's hard enough to play for to be interesting. What them rubber-tire people done was to make me a present of a whole lot of other stock the other day and raise the dividends. I can't buy into no company at all, it seems like, 'less'n every twenty minutes or so they up and declare another dividend. I don't like it. I wisht I could find some real man's-size game to play, because I'm like you — I get lonesome."

Still, he was looking thoughtful.

"Some games we can play," says he. "Then again, seems like there's others we can't. Now about the kid ——"

"She's busy all the time," says I to him. "She reads and paints. Sundays she goes to church, while you and me only put on a collar that hurts. Week days she goes down to the picture galleries and into the liberry. She buys books. She's got her own cars — the big car and the electric brougham you give her on her birthday last week — ain't a thing in the world she ain't got. She's plumb happy."

"Except that she ain't!"

"You mean that we don't know nobody — nobody comes in to visit?" He nods. "Well, why don't we go in and call on them Wisner people that lives next to us?" says I.

"We can't do that; the rules of the game is that the folks living in a place first has to make the first call."

"That's a fool rule," says I.

"Shore it is; but Bonnie Bell knows all them rules and she ain't going to make any break — Old Man Smith taught her a few things — or maybe she learned it instinctive from her ma. Her ma was a Maryland Janney. They pretty near knew. And yet she told me —— Oh, shucks, Curly!"

"Well, what did she say?"

"She says she met Old Lady Wisner fair out on the sidewalk one morning and she was going to speak to her; they was both of them going down to their cars, which was standing side by side on the street. The old lady, she turns up her nose, such as there was of it, and she looks the other way. That hurt my girl a good deal. You know she ain't got a unkind thought in her heart for nobody or nothing on earth. She never was broke to be afraid of nothing or expect nothing but good of nobody — you and me taught her that, didn't we, Curly? And that old cat wouldn't look at my girl! Well, Curly, that's what I mean when I say there is some games that seems hard to play. Don't a woman get the worst of it every way of the deck, anyhow?"

"Well now," says I, "ain't there no way we can break in there comfortable like?"

"I don't see how," says he, shaking his head.

"Why can't we kill their dog?" says I. "Something friendly, just to start things going."

"That ain't no good," says he. "We tried it. Bonnie Bell already killed two of their dogs with her new electric brougham. You see, she had to go out and try it for herself, for she says she can ride anything that has hair on it, even if it's only curled hair in the cushions. First thing you know, the Wisner dog — pug nose it was, with its tail curled tight — it goes out on the road, acting like it owned the whole street, same as its folks does. Well, right then him and Bonnie Bell's new electric mixes it. The dog got the worst of it.

"Look-a-here, Curly," says he after a while, and pulls a square piece of paper outen his pocket. "Here's what we got in return for that — before Bonnie Bell had time to say she was sorry. The old lady wrote, for once:

> Mrs. David Abraham Wisner requests that the people living next door to her exercise greater care in the operation of their vehicles, as the animal lost through the criminal carelessness of one of these people was of great value.

"Ain't that hell?" says he. "Cheerful, ain't it? No name signed to it — nothing! But you can see from that just how they felt. That was three days ago. They got a new dog. Well, this morning Bonnie Bell killed that one!

"The trouble with them dogs is, they been used to thinking they own this whole end of the street. They don't seem to recognize that we're anybody at all. It's a awful thing and it put Bonnie Bell in wrong. She didn't know what to do. She was so mad she wouldn't write. So she sends for Jimmie — I mean James, our chauffore — he's got almost sober lately, it being three months or so since Christmas, and him knowing a lot about dogs. So she buys a new dog for them — a large one that you can see easy, a collie dog; and Jimmie says he paid one-fifty for it."

"A dollar and a half is more than any dog is worth," says I, "especial a dog that has anything to do with someone like that Wisner woman."

"A dollar and a half!" says he. "A hundred and fifty is what it cost; this was a swell dog — a young collie about a year old. Well, Bonnie Bell, she sends it round by James, our chauffore, with her compliments. Their butler takes it in. I don't know whether it's going to stick or not. It's a sort of olive branch. You see, Bonnie Bell can't write to no such people, but she is sorry for killing their dogs and she wants to make good somehow. I think it was a right good way. It looks like she could hold her own, and yet like she was willing to meet 'em halfway.

"Well, that's all we can do," says he. "Let it go the way it lays on the board. I don't like Old Man Wisner a little bit anyhow."

"Well," says I, "if he's running for alderman, why don't you run for sher'f or something, just to keep occupied?"

"I'm studying my ward," says he. "I don't know very many of the saloon people yet. You have to be pretty far along to get to be sher'f in a place like this. But now, a alderman might be easier, if you went at it right. Anyways, the way they have acted, I feel like I'd copper any game Old Man Wisner was playing. I kind of feel in my bones that him and me is going to lock horns, Curly. I don't like the way he acts; and, I tell you, when I want a neighbor to be friendly with me he's got to be friendly sometime."

Old Man Wright gets up now and walks around some, kind of grinning.

"But, on the whole, I may find something to keep me busy here in town. For instance, Old Man Wisner is back of some sort of steal, shore as you're born, in the Lake Shore Electric Extension that's going on up in there — the paper says he's been selling it, or the interests has. Why? He never done a direct thing in his life — that ain't the way he does business; for that matter, it ain't the way business is done in the city nohow. It's always done at a side door, not at a front door, the way we done it on the Yellow Bull — straight out, even-Stephen.

"I figure he starts that story to make that stock cheap. Well, the other day I buy up a little of it, right cheap at that — not much; only a few hundred thousand dollars. Now I figure that if it ever goes up for Old Man Wisner it will go up some for me. I may buy some more of it. I don't know as it is worth anything — maybe not; but it certainly would please me if I could find some kind of a side game here where I couldn't make no money. I'm bored, Curly," says he; "that's what's the matter with me."

But still he came round again and again to the real center of our coming to town — Bonnie Bell. Him and me could have had a good time, but we knew perfectly well that she wasn't having no good time.

"Curly," says he, kind of frowning and his jaw working some, "she ain't got a friend in this whole damn town."

"Listen at you!" says I to him. "What are you talking about? She has got us, ain't she? We are her friends. We've raised her. We are going to take care of her. Ain't that enough?"

"No, Curly," says he to me; "we ain't enough."

VII

WHAT THEIR HIRED MAN DONE

"WELL," says Old Man Wright to Bonnie Bell one day about four o'clock when we was having a cup of tea, which William insisted we ought to drink then, "what have them folks over there said about the dog you sent 'em?"

"They haven't said a word," says Bonnie Bell. "They kept the dog though. I don't think much of that outfit, if you ask me, dad," says she.

"Nor me neither," says he. "It was too bad you run over their dog, or so many of their dogs; but then you done what you could, sending 'em another dog as big as all you killed. A collie is right smart. I hope this one will keep on the sidewalk and not get under the wheels. That Boston dog of yours always has me guessing."

Well, we talked on a while, both of us sort of joshing her on her dog deal, until she gets up and goes away from the little table where she is setting and stands in front of the window, looking out, her teacup in her hand. All at once she says:

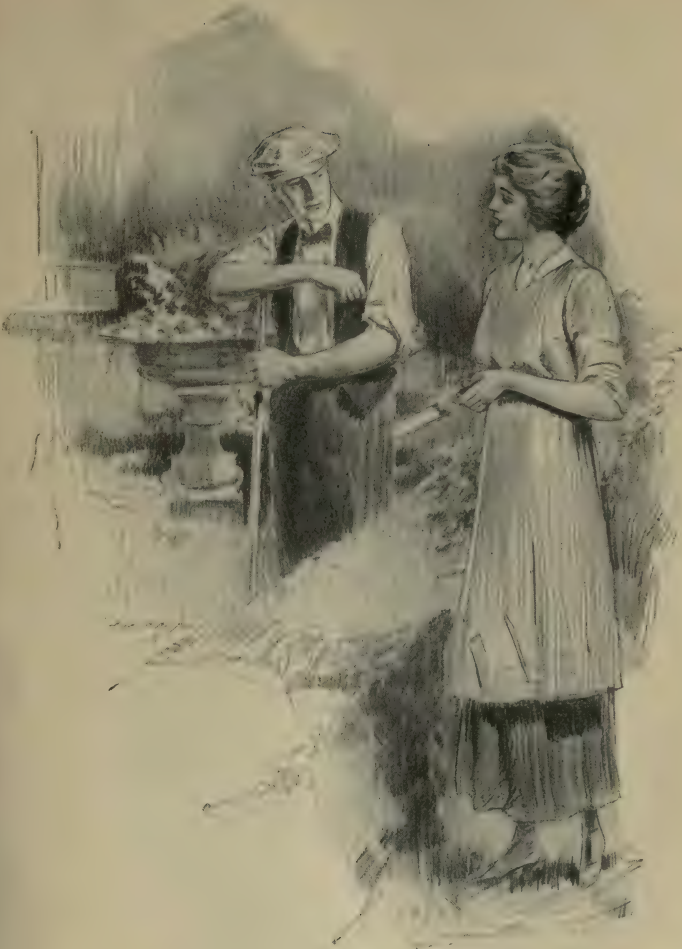
"Good Lord!"

"What's wrong?" says her pa, and we all holler at her. But she is out of the room and down at the door before we can stop her, all in her gingham apern and cap, like she is then; for she had been looking after the housecleaning — though William looks at her sad for not being dressed up more.

We went to the window and looked out. All at once we heard a awful barking going on down there, and we seen what had happened. That new dog of theirs had come into our yard to look around, and Bonnie Bell's Boston dog, Peanut — which mostly rode in her car with her — had jumped this here visiting dog, and they was having it out sincere, right in our front yard.

Well, sir, it was one of the prettiest fights you ever seen. A collie ain't no slouch in a scrap, and if this dog wouldn't of been so young he like enough could of licked Peanut, all right. But, you see, Peanut he was taking care of his own folks, according to the way he figured it, and this was a intrusion on the part of the Wisner dog.

Anything that's got bull pup in him, like Peanut had, ain't got no sense about fighting; so Peanut he mixed it with the collie copious, and they tumbled all over the yard until you couldn't hardly tell which was which. At last Peanut got himself a good leg holt, and the



"'Well,' says he, 'our dog is more of a trench fighter.'"

collie hollers bloody murder and starts for home and mother through the fence, Peanut hanging on.

It seems like their front door was open; and the collie he made for it, hollering every jump, and Peanut after him. He chases him plumb up the steps and clear into the house, and that was all we could see for a while, except Bonnie Bell standing in her cap and apern, looking across. Then through the window we could see folks running round here and there, like the dogs had got into the middle of the house and was still mixing it.

By and by — three or four minutes — their butler comes out, holding Peanut by the collar, and drops him on the front steps. But Peanut he is game, and he ain't had no satisfaction out of this scrap; so he goes back and scratches most of the paint offen their front door, and barks and howls, trying to get back in to finish his job.

Bonnie Bell she stands there just crying because she is so much ashamed, and she calls and whistles to Peanut. When he comes, at last, he does it looking over his shoulder and growling, and daring that other dog to come out and knock a chip off'n his shoulder.

When Bonnie Bell come back in, carrying Peanut, happy, by the loose skin of his neck, she was more worried than I ever seen her about anything.

"Now we've done it!" says she. "Our dog run right in their house and chased their dog. There was guests there, too — look at the cars standing out there. They was holding some kind of a party — bridge, like enough. Oh, whatever shall we do!"

"Come here, Peanut," says Old Man Wright; which Peanut jumps up on his lap then. "Have something on the house," says he; "and if that dog comes over in here eat him up!"

Peanut understands this perfect, and he goes to the window and tries to get out, and barks until you could hear him a block.

"That is some dog, sis," says her pa. "It looks like, anyhow, some of our family has broke into polite society for once. Come here, pup!" And he pats Peanut on the head and laughs like he is going to die over it. But not Bonnie Bell!

There was a awful silence come in between them two big houses after that. There wasn't anything that we seen fit to say and they didn't pay no attention to us. Their hired man — that worked round the back yard sometimes in overalls and a sweater — he sometimes walks out in the yard with their collie, but he takes mighty good care to keep on his own side of the fence.

It was getting spring by now — sort of raw weather once in a while; but the grass was getting green, and some of Bonnie Bell's flowers she had planted was beginning to show up through the ground, and once in a while she would go out, in old clothes mostly, with maybe a cap and a apern and fuss round with her flowers. She wouldn't never look across at the Wisner house.

Their hired man that taken care of their dog was the one that taken care of their flowers, same as she did of ours. One morning it seems like, not noticing each other, they was working along kind of close to the fence, not far apart from each other, and all at once he stands up and sees her.

"Good morning!" says he, which Bonnie Bell couldn't help.

She looks up and sees him standing there, with his hat in his hand, respectful enough; and, since he was only one of their hired people, her not feeling any way but friendly to anybody on earth that is halfway decent to her, she says:

"Good morning! I see you're fixing your flowers too."

"Yes," says he; "these crocuses will soon be out. What color is yours?"

"All sorts," says she; "and I do hope they'll all do well."

"I'd be glad to be of any help I could," says he.

"Well, that's kind of you," says she; "you, being a gardener, know more about these things than I do." About then this here collie dog comes up to where he is standing.

"Oh, goodness!" says Bonnie Bell. "Don't let that dog come over in our yard, whatever you do."

All at once he broke out a-laughing.

"I'll take care of him," says he. "I wouldn't take a thousand for that dog. They didn't want to keep him, but I said they'd have to. That was a good fight they had in the house," says he, and laughed again.

Bonnie Bell she got red, and says she:

"I'm awfully sorry. That dog of ours is a terror to fight. We can't break him of it any way. I hope you'll apologize to your people," says she — "that is, if they wouldn't take it wrong of us to have it mentioned. I don't know."

"Oh, no; I guess that'll be all right," says he. "I've been with 'em so long, you see, I can kind of make free about it. If you feel bad about it I'll tell 'em; but it wasn't your fault."

"It would be just like that bunch of yours," says she, "not to let on that they had heard from us that I was sorry. I oughtn't to say it maybe, but ——"

"Well now," says the hired man, frank-like enough, "that's just the way I feel. I often tell the old man, myself, that he ain't so much — he come from Iowa once when he didn't have a cent to his name, and yet he puts on more side now than anybody else on the street."

"Did you ever dare to say that to him?" says Bonnie Bell.

"I certainly did, and more than once. I ain't afraid to say anything to either one of 'em," says he. "They don't dare say much to me. I know too much about 'em. But, say now — about that fight," says he. "I want to tell you that new dog we've got is some peach. Give him a year or so and he'll eat up that pup of yours."

"He never seen the day he could and he never will!" says Bonnie Bell. "If you feel that way about it ——"

"Well," says he, "our dog is more of a trench fighter. He got under the tables where them old hens was playing bridge and he held out until your pup flanked in on him."

"Did you see the fight?" says Bonnie Bell.

"Sure I did! I was right there."

"Yes?" says she. "In such clothes?"

"Just like I am. I happened to be going past the room where they was holding their party and just then the dogs came in. Believe me, it was more fun than there has been in our house for a good many years. Of course it was some informal."

"Well," says Bonnie Bell, "I can see you must of been in the family a long time or you wouldn't feel the way you do."

"Twenty-odd years," says he, drawing hisself up. "I was taken captive in my early youth, and I have been in servitude ever since, with no hope of getting away," says he. "But a fellow has to make a living somehow and I had only my labor to sell. You see, I know something about flowers, and I can drive a car now some or run a boat."

"We've bought one of those little boats," says Bonnie Bell. "Sometime I'm going to take her out and learn how to run her myself."

"You ought to be careful about this lake," says he. "It gets awful rough sometimes. Still, it's good fun."

You can see they was visiting right and left — just her and the hired man! But, her being so lonesome that way all the time, it seemed like she'd have to talk to somebody, and this man seemed right friendly, though he was only a workingman. Bonnie Bell never was stuck up at all. Maybe he thought she was one of our maids.

"Gardening is all right," says he finally, drawing close to the fence; "but, for me, I'd rather be a cowman than anything I know. I'd rather ride a cowhorse than drive any car on earth. This life here gets on my nerves."

"Don't it?" says she to him. "Sometimes I feel that way myself."

"What anybody finds to like in a city is more than I can see. If I had money I'd buy a ranch," says he, "and then I'd live happy ever after."

Now wasn't that funny, him wanting to do just the very thing we had quit doing and us going to live right alongside of him that way? Still, of course, he was only a hired man — ain't none of 'em contented. I ain't always, myself.

Bonnie Bell thought this was getting too sort of personal and she starts in toward the house — she tells me a good deal of this afterward — but he come up closer to the fence and seemed kind of sorry to have her go; and says he:

"Wait a minute. I was telling you about my ranch. I'm going to have one some day. Do you think I'd live here all my life with the old gentleman and the old lady, and nothing to do but tinkering round flowers and cars? I ain't that trifling."

"I must be going in," says she then.

So she left him. He nearly climbed over the fence to keep her from going, and the last thing she heard him say was:

"I hope I can help you about the flowers." She began to think he was kind of fresh like. She told me what he said.

Her pa seen some of this out of the window and he called her down when she come in.

"I don't think I'd talk much with any of them folks if I was in your place," says he.

"Why, dad," says she, "you don't want me to be stuck up like them, do you?"

Then she told him how Peanut had chased their dog in there and broke up their bridge party. They both had to laugh at that.

"Their gardener, James, told me that Old Man Wisner ain't much, nor the old lady neither," says Bonnie Bell after a while. "It's just what I thought."

"I don't know as he ought to talk that way about the people he works for," says her pa. "I'd be kind of careful about any man that was knocking his boss — wouldn't you, Curly?"

"Well, it was all my fault, dad," says she. "He said good morning; then I ast him about the flowers and he offered to help me with the crocuses."

"Don't take no help from none of that Wisner outfit," says her pa. "You hear me?"

As spring come along and the weather got pleasanter, Bonnie Bell was happier, because she could get out of doors more. Now she took to running this new power boat we had. It was a whizzer. It didn't take her long to learn how to run it. About everybody in Millionaire Row had boathouses on the lake and most of them had these gasoline boats — you could hear them sput-sputting round out there evenings almost any bright day.

Her pa didn't like her to go out on the lake very much; being from Wyoming he was scared of water — especial so much of it. He tells Bonnie Bell to be careful and, if she must go out on the lake, to only go when it was smooth.

In one way there wasn't no need to be scared about the girl, for she could swim like a duck — Old Man Smith taught all of 'em that. Nearly every morning she would go out in her bathing suit down our walk and through our garridge, and across the dock, and dive into that water where it was more than forty feet deep and as cold as ice. She wasn't afraid. She would come back wet and laughing, and say she liked it. I wouldn't have done that for a farm. I don't believe in going into water unless you have to ford.

I hate anything that runs by gasoline, because it's a shore thing that sooner or later it'll ball up on you somewheres. A good cowhorse is the only safe thing to go anywhere with, and anybody knows that. Bonnie Bell coaxed me out in her boat once — but not more than once. The lake wasn't so rough neither; but the boat riz up and down until I didn't feel right, and I wouldn't go no more. But Bonnie Bell got so some afternoons she'd be out hours at a time, ripping and charging up and down, water flying out from the front of the boat. Mostly she'd ride in her bathing clothes, and her hair done up under her cap. There was kind of a wild streak in her anyway and she was always taking chances.

One evening round four or five o'clock, after a warm day in the summer time, she was out there about a quarter of a mile from the shore and all by herself. There was quite a wind up, and the waves was rolling pretty high, breaking white on top, too, and making such a noise I was plumb uneasy. Her pa was away from home; so I went down on the dock and stood out there trying to holler at her so she would hear me, but I couldn't make her hear. I waved things, too, but she didn't seem to see them.

She was a sort of dare-devil at riding or driving anything, and I reckon maybe she was enjoying that sloshing through the water, though I expected every minute to see the boat go upside down. I could hear the engine of the boat going fast — sput-sput-sput-t-t! I could only hope it would keep all right. All gas engines is sinful.

She had been the only one out on the lake right then, it being so rough; but along about now, down toward town, a half mile or so off, I seen another boat coming, lifting up high on top of the waves, then going out of sight in the hollow for quite a while. It was heading straight in for our place. The fellow in it was running kind of sideways to the waves and I would a heap rather it would of been him in the boat than me.

Bonnie Bell was a little farther out, heading into the waves and enjoying the rocking, it seemed like. By and by I seen her looking off to the south; and then her engine begin to sput-sput a heap faster, and I seen her boat swing out and head that way.

I looked out at the other boat then. I didn't see it for a while, but at last it swung up on top of a big wave. It wasn't the way it had been, but blacker. I seen the water shine on the boards. Then I knowed what had happened — the boat had turned over.

It was just like Bonnie Bell to head in to see if she could help. I hollered at her, but she couldn't hear and I don't reckon she'd of stopped anyways.

Them little boats goes awful fast and it seemed like *Bonnie Bell* — for that was the name of her boat, her pa had gave it that name — didn't seem to hit the waves none, only in the high places. In just a little while she was where the upset had done happened. I seen her slow down and swing in, and then stand up and whirl a rope. Then she reached over and then hauled back.

"Well, anyhow," says I to myself, "she's saved a corpse," says I.

I learned afterward that he wasn't dead and that when Bonnie Bell reaches in and grabs him by the collar she tells him to keep still or she'll soak him over the head with the boat hook.

"We'll be in in a minute," says she to him. Of course I didn't know that then.

It seems like she didn't try to haul him plumb in, the waves running so high; and she run the engine with one hand and held on to him with the other, him dragging along at one side of the boat and getting a mouthful of water every once in a while. It wasn't very far off from our dock and pretty soon they come alongside.

"Grab him, Curly!" says she; so I grabbed him when she swung in and hauled him up.

He was wet all over and at first he seemed half mad. I seen who he was then — he was the Wisner's hired man.

"Why didn't you let me alone?" says he. "I'd 'a' got her all right pretty soon. You might have gone over too."

"What?" says she, scornful. "You're all right anyways, and you got no kick coming."

She stood up in her bathing clothes, wet as she could be, and part of her hair hanging down underneath her cap, and he looked at her kind of humble. And says he:

"I thank you very much. Pardon me for what I said." Then he looks down at his clothes and seen they was wet, and he broke out laughing. "All to the candy!" says he. "My life saved for my country!" says he.

"There wasn't no sense in your going over," says Bonnie Bell, scolding him. "You was getting your mixture too rich and you clogged up your engine. You can't overfeed them two-cycles that way and get away with it."

"That wasn't the trouble at all," says he. "I caught my foot in the ignition wire and broke it off. Of course she couldn't run then; but I could of swum in from where I was and the boat would have drifted in."

"You would have got good and wet swimming in," says she, still scornful, "and you would have got pounded to pieces against the sea wall; that's what would have happened to you. Some folks," says she, "ain't fit to go out alone anyways."

And, so saying, she leaves us both, wet as she was in her bathing clothes, and runs on through the boat-house and up the steps. He stood looking after her, sober.

"Don't I know that!" says he, turning to me. "If it hadn't been for her it would have been all day with me. But I certainly thought she'd be over."

"It's a good thing Bonnie Bell could run that boat," says I.

"Bonnie Bell?" says he. "Is that her name? By Jove! Well now, by Jove! And what's your name?" says he.

"Wilson," says I. "They call me Curly for short."

"Curly?" says he. "That sounds sort of like a cowboy's name, don't it?"

"I never seen a cow camp yet where there wasn't some cowpuncher name Curly," says I.

"Cowpuncher! You wasn't ever one yourself, was you?" says he.

"I never was nothing else," says I.

Then he held out his hand.

"Shake!" says he. "Some folks gets what other folks wishes. Ain't it the truth?"

"What do you mean?" I ast him.

"Well," says he, "I always wanted to be a cowboy, yet I never did have a chance to go on a ranch."

"You're the gardener, ain't you?" says I, and he nods.

"That's all I get to do. Still, I may have a chance to do better sometime."

He was a right nice-looking fellow, clean shaved and his hair cut good, and his mustache cut right short. He looks down at his clothes now, but he didn't seem to care — acted like he had plenty more; and he laughed.

He was wet, but he wasn't shivering. He come pretty near drowning but he wasn't scared. I rather liked him even if he was only a hired man like myself. He seemed sort of hardy.

"You know how she got me?" he ast me now. "She threw the loop of a rope over me, and if I hadn't got it in my hand I reckon she'd of choked me to death."

"She's a good roper," says I, "and she can ride as well as she can rope."

"Could you ever show me how to rope?" says he. "Would you?"

"Shore I'll show you sometime if we ever get a chance," says I. "I'll look round in our ranch room there in the house, and see if I can find a rope."

"Have you got a room in there like a ranch?" says he.

"Exacty like our old ranch," says I. "It's the main room out of the old Circle Arrow Ranch."

"Could she, now — would she help teach a fellow how to rope a drowning person?" says he. "That's what she done. She's a corker, ain't she?"

"She shore is," says I. "Her own folks mostly reserves the right to say that, though."

"I beg pardon," says he, and he got red again. "I know where I belong."

"Just kind of keep on knowing where you belong and where she belongs, son," says I —" it's two different propositions. I trust, my good man," says I to him, " that you understand I'm the foreman of the ranch."

" Don't it beat the world," says he to me after a while — us standing there still talking though he was wet as a rat —" how things is run? Sometimes it seems like we can't help ourselfs, and we all get into the wrong places trying to get into the right ones. Now I'd like to thank that lady; but I can't. She's wonderfully beautiful, isn't she — your mistress? I say now, Curly, you thank her for me, won't you?"

I felt rather savage towards anybody coming from the Wisner side of the fence, but someway this fellow was so decent, and he evident meant to be so square, that I couldn't hardly feel no way but friendly to him.

" You've been with your folks quite a while, ain't you?" says I after a while.

" Oh, yes; I suppose I'm kind of useful in the scheme some ways or they'd tie a can to me."

" In Millionaire Row, the way I figure it," says I to him, " the Wisners is the king bees?"

He nods.

" I'm afraid that's about the truth. At least that's the way they think it is — the old man and the old lady. Folks that don't swing in line with their ways they get froze out."

"Is that so?" says I, getting hot under the collar right away. "Well, let me tell you something: When it comes to playing any kind of freeze-out, where Old Man Wright is concerned, believe me, there's two sides to that game. Do you see?"

I looked straight at him, and I went on:

"Nobody ever seen Old Man Wright weaken in nothing he once begun. As for money, he can't be making less than a million a month or so right here in this town where he is now. He's one of them kind that does."

"I believe you," says he. "Was you saying that your folks used to own the Circle Arrow Ranch out in Wyoming?"

"Uh-huh; and I wisht we did right now."

"That's funny," says he. "And you sold it to a syndicate?"

"Uh-huh — damn 'em!"

"And Old Man Wisner was one of the silent partners and one of the biggest owners in that syndicate — colonization and irrigation. There ain't anything that he won't go against that there's money in, and he mostly wins," says he.

"Well, what do you know about that!" says I. "Us moving in here and living right next door to him — that's the funniest thing I ever did hear. They shore was on opposite sides of that game, wasn't they, them two folks? Well, Old Man Wisner got the worst of it — that's all. You can't raise nothing on that land except cows and he'll find it out. We got some of our deferred payments coming in, like enough; but it wouldn't surprise me if we got all that land back sometime, and I shore hope we do."

He kind of puckers up his mouth and puts his fingers on it.

"By Jove!" says he. "By Jove! Would you give me a job cowpunching, Curly?" says he.

"Not unless you could rope better then than you can now," says I. "And if you can't ride a horse any better than you can a boat I don't think you could earn your board."

He took it all right, and only laughed.

I went up through the boathouse and the garridge and up the back steps into the little portico — sort of storm door that's over the back door of our house where it looks out over the lake. If you'll believe me, there was Bonnie Bell standing there, all in her bathing clothes! She hadn't gone in yet.

"Has he gone, Curly?" says she.

"He has just went," says I. "What are you doing here, all wet? Why didn't you go in right away?"

"Is he all right, Curly?" says she, sort of rolling her hair up off her neck and into her rubber cap.

"Yes," says I; "he ain't hurt none."

"What were you talking about so long?" says she.

"A good many things — you, for instance," I says to her.

"What did he say?" she ast of me.

"Why, nothing much; only how sorry he was you saved his life."

"Sorry — why?"

"Well, it makes a man feel mighty mean to have a woman save his life."

"Did he say that?" she says to me. Now when Bonnie Bell smiles she sort of has a dimple here and there. She sort of smiled now. "What kept you out there so long? You two people was talking like two old women."

"Well," I says, "I was just promising to show him how to rope; he says he wants to learn."

"When are you going to show him, Curly?"

"Oh, sometime some morning, like enough, down there on the dock. He says he'll sneak over from his place, so no one will see him. I don't reckon your pa will mind my showing a young fellow how to rope — I'd like to feel a rope in my hand again anyhow. I expect before long he'll be wearing a wide hat and singing 'O, bury me not on the lone prairee!'"

"Curly," says she.

"What?"

"Did you find my rope in along with those in the big room? I forget whether I brought it along."

"Kid," says I, "if there's going to be any instruction to hired men on the rope or mouth organ or jew's-harp, or anything of that sort, it's me that gives it. I'm segundo on this ranch. Now you go on upstairs."

She had her hair all pushed back now under her cap, wet as it was, standing there fixing it. She was in her bathing clothes still and awful wet, but she didn't seem cold. She looked kind of pink and sort of happy; I don't know why. Lord, she was a fine-looking girl! There never was one handsomer than Bonnie Bell Wright.

"Kid, you heard me!" says I. "Go on upstairs now and get your clothes on. And you don't go out in that boat no more!"

VIII

HOW OLD MAN WRIGHT DONE BUSINESS

AS the weather begun to get warmer and we got out-of-doors more, it was cheerfuller around our place. Bonnie Bell chirked up quite a bit. She used to sing some. It seemed like she was going to get used to living in town — not me; never!

But Old Man Wright didn't seem to worry none somehow. He was one of the sort that, put him down anywheres and he'd be busy at something. If he was set down on a sand bar beside a creek he'd reach around to find some sticks; and, first thing you know, he'd be building a house out of 'em — he just always was making things somehow. I never seen a man could size up a piece of country for what it would perduce better than him.

"Curly," says he to me one day when I was down in his new office and he was talking about making money, "there's different ways of getting rich," says he, "but only one system. Either get what a mighty few thinks they got to have — that's things for rich folks; or else get something that everybody has got to have whether they want it or not — that's things for poor folks.

And when you're in the game you buy when things is low and sell when they is high. Nigh about every man you know plays the game just the other way around. That's why there's so many poor folks," says he. "Yet the game is plumb easy to beat when you know how, if making money is all you care about.

"For instance," says he, "when I bought that bunch of stock in the Lake Electric a while ago it was when nobody wanted it or let on they wanted it. Since then it has riz round fifteen or twenty points and it'll go higher. When I sold the Circle Arrow it was when them folks wanted it right bad. Between you and me, them people paid more for it than it was worth. I may buy it in some day when they don't want it no more."

"You reckon you ever will, Colonel?" says I, plumb happy to think of that.

"If I was alone in the world, with just you, I shorely would right off," says he, "no matter what it cost. With Bonnie Bell in the game, too, I don't know what I'll do nor when I'll do it.

"I don't have such a hard time here," he went on after a while. "For instance, just a few weeks ago I was reading in the papers about this war in Europe — which is a shame and a awful thing; and I hope it won't come here, though if it does you and me are in," says he. "Well, I seen how they make so much powder and sell it — smokeless powder. For that they have to use a awful lot of picric acid."

"What kind of acid?" says I. "Pickles?"

"I don't know," says he. "I wouldn't know it if it was on a plate — only I know they have to make smokeless powder out of it. So I bought all I could find laying round here or there — not very much; only two or three hundred thousand dollars' worth.

"Well," says he, stretching out his legs and yawning, "it's the same old story, Curly. I couldn't help it and I didn't mean to do it the least way in the world; but now this here picric acid — whatever it is — it's worth two or three times what it was just a little while ago. I cleaned up — oh, maybe two or three hundred thousand dollars on that. There ain't enough in these things to keep me very busy. I don't care for making money nohow, because it's so easy. If there was a real man's game now, I wouldn't mind mixing with it."

"Cows is something that folks has to have whether they are rich or poor," says I to him.

"Shore; and it's a good game too. If you look around you'll find that there is some things that everybody has got to use somehow, somewhere — wood, copper, oil, iron; things like that. You can't build houses and live in 'em unless you have some of them things. Everybody has to buy 'em in wholesale or in retail. I like to buy 'em a little farther back even than wholesale — when they are what you call raw resources.

"If you take things that's made up in packages you can sell them too, a little at a time, but slow. Some folks likes to trade that way; they got to have pictures — objects — right before 'em to believe their money's safe. That's a little slow for me and you, Curly. I like to take the goods before they are put up in packages and buy a lot of them — something that folks has got to have."

"That's where your game is weak, Colonel," says I. "For instance, you deal in cows on the hoof. That ain't respectable. When you cut up cows and hogs into sides, hams and sausage, then's when you get respectable. Ain't you got plenty proof of that? Look at them Wisners, for instance."

He snorts at that and ain't happy.

"Well, it's the truth," says I. "Look at us! We ain't nobody here. Old Man Wisner's the king bee of this here row of houses. We ain't one-two-ten in this race."

"Huh! Is that so? I'm running free, under a pull; and you can't kick. But then, we're having all the fun — not Bonnie Bell."

"I ain't having no fun worth speaking of myself," says I. "But she's doing well enough — she's disgusting healthy — sounder in wind and limb than anybody else in this town. And she's busy too; she's found a new kind of car that she says she's got to have. She says the Wisners bought one a little shinier than hers."

"Well, she can have whatever she wants. We are doing pretty well, seems like. I just went into a little speculation last week that will maybe pay for that new car."

"What's it about this time, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Well, it has something more to do with this here war. Whenever there is a war somebody makes money and everybody loses it. Now you see they're using a awful lot of sharpnel over there — bullets packed up in packages ready to be busted open. It takes a certain kind of lathe to turn them sharpnel, and there is only one kind of lathe in this country that does it faster than any other; and the people that makes sharpnel can't get enough of them. Well, I bought the control of that there lathe. Looking around not long ago, I found a little stove factory down in the sand hills; and I bought it and put a few of them lathes in there and started a little company.

"Besides, I control them lathes that goes into all the other factories where they make sharpnel. Shouldn't wonder if we'd run into a little money before long — enough to buy a car — five hundred thousand dollars or so. If they got to have sharpnel I suppose we might as well make 'em and make 'em good."

"Well, Colonel," says I, "I hope you'll find enough to do, so that one of these days you can be right comfortable."

"So do I," says he, and he sticks out his legs again, with his hands in his pockets. "But sometimes I almost lose heart about it. Things looks mighty sad to me, because I can't find no game that's interesting for to play."

"How about that running-for-alderman business?" says I.

"I'm looking that over," says he. "I know a good many of the fellows over on the west side of our ward. My freckles helps me some in that part of the ward. They can't look at freckles like mine and call me anything but a honest man. Our ward is in two parts, and a little wears silk socks and a good deal of it don't. Wisner, he's strong with them that does. He maybe ain't so strong with them that makes eight dollars a week. Maybe none of them works for Wisner, but plenty of other people that works for eight dollars a week does work for him."

"He shore makes plenty of money," says I. "I expect he's got more money than anybody in town."

"I'm willing to stack up a little money in this alderman game against him if I thought I'd get any fun out of it. I'm just marking time here, the way it is."

"Doing what?" I ast him.

"Making money and waiting."

"What for?" says I, not understanding.

"For some man," says he.

"What man?" I ast him, still not understanding.

"That's what I don't know. For some man that will make Bonnie Bell happy. But all the young men in a city talk alike and look alike and dress alike. I ain't seen more than one or two that was worth a cuss — not a one I thought was good enough for my girl. And yet it stands to reason that something will happen; and it might be any time. It makes me uneasy."

I couldn't see why more folks didn't come into our house, like they used to out on the Circle Arrow; and I said that.

"It's easy to see why they don't," says Old Man Wright, and he busts the glass top of his table with his fist. "It's plumb plain to see why. It's them Wisners has blocked our game. They coppered us from the start — that's what! We got in wrong at the start with them; we didn't kotow to them and they've always been expecting it."

"That puts us in pretty hard," says I.

"It wouldn't be hard for you or me, Curly," says he. "There ain't a game on earth that that pie-faced old hypocrite can play that I can't beat him at; I don't fear him no more than I like him. But when I see how easy it was for him and his folks to make my girl miserable —— It ain't on account of myself, Curly," says he, and he sweeps his hand over the desk and knocks every paper and everything else on the floor. "She's all I got," says he. "I loved her ma and I love her. Whatever goes against her happiness goes against me all the way through. And," says he, "I'll buck this here city game until some day I bust the bank!"

I left him setting there, sort of looking down at his feet, with his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out. He wasn't happy none at all, though all the time he'd been hollering for some game that he couldn't beat.

IX

US AND THEIR FENCE

WE went on thataway a good while into the summer and nothing much happened between us and our neighbors. Maybe once in a while our dog Peanut would get over in their back yard and scratch up their pansies. Peanut always liked to lay in fresh dirt, and he seemed to know instinctive which was our pansy beds and which was theirn. Their hired man only laughed when I seen him and apologized.

He used to come over once in a while, their hired man did, and meet me on the dock back of the boathouse, where I give him lessons in roping. I showed him a few things — how to let go when he got his rope straight, and to give hisself plenty of double back of the hondoo. We used to rope the snubbing posts where we tied the boats. Sometimes we'd practice for a hour or so and he begun to get on right well. We visited that way several days, usual of mornings.

"Don't the lady ever come down to the boats no more?" says he one time.

"No," says I. "Her pa's afraid she'll get drownded."

"Does she ever talk about saving the life of anybody?" he ast.

"No," I says; "she's used to such things. She don't take no account anyways of saving the life of a laboring man," says I. "It's nothing to her."

"Ain't it funny," says he, "how things work out sometimes? At first, you know, I thought she was one of your housemaids."

"You done what?" says I.

"Well, I don't deny it. When I first seen her in the yard, the time she chased that dog over, I thought she was one of the maids — you see, she had on a cap and a apern. I didn't know at all. The old lady thinks it yet."

"She's mighty kind-hearted, even with the lower classes," says I. "She even gives money to them people that play music in front of our house every morning. I wish they wouldn't."

"I wish she wouldn't do that," says he. "We have a awful time with that band. The old man said if he ever got to be alderman he'd get a ordinance through abolishing them off the streets. They play something fierce!" says he.

"Is he going to run for alderman?" says I. "I seen something in the papers about it."

"Well, yes; I believe he will — I heard him say he would."

"If he does," says I, "I reckon hell will pop in this ward."

"Why?" says he.

"Well, my boss is figuring he may run for alderman hisself — he's naturalized here now. He used to be sher'f out in Cody whenever he wanted to be. When he wants anything, seems like he can't hardly help getting it. It's a way he has."

He looks kind of thoughtful at that.

"Well, now," says he, "well now, what do you know about that! As you say, Curly, ain't that hell?"

He swore so easy and natural that I kind of liked him, and the way he taken up roping was to my thinking about the best of any tenderfoot I ever seen.

"What are they piling up them rocks along the side of the yard for, Jimmie?" I ast him after a while.

You see, there was several wagonloads of brick and stuff had been put in there that morning.

"I don't know," says he. "Something the old man ordered, I reckon. He's away right now. They don't always tell me about things as much as I think they might."

"I've often wondered they didn't fire you," says I.

"They can't," says he. "I told you I've got too much on 'em. They don't dast to fire me none at all. I defy 'em!" says he.

"Well, you better be a little careful," says I. "I've seen people felt that way about their boss before now, and right often they got the can. You better not get fired till you know a little bit more about roping and riding."

"Hush!" says he. "I think I heard someone over in our boathouse. Good-by! I'll come round again tomorrow morning."

He went on down the dock into their boathouse. I set down not far from the door, smoking and looking out over the lake. I heard someone in there begin to talk. It was him and Old Lady Wisner — I'd heard her before once in a while. I couldn't help hearing them if I'd wanted to, and I did want to.

"James," says she, "where have you been? I've been looking everywhere for you."

"Why, nowhere especial," says he carelesslike. "I was just over on the dock doing some roping stunts with Curly."

"I suppose you mean that red-headed, pigeon-toed brute that hangs around the Wrights' place," says she.

Say, when she said that I half riz up, for I shore was mad. I may be the way she said, but I don't allow no one else to say so. But she wasn't a man anyway; so I had to stand it. I read somewhere in a book it ain't correct to listen when folks don't know you're hearing them; but that didn't go with me no more, especial when people was talking about me and my hair and legs thataway. So I set down and listened some more.

"Well," says Jimmie, "I haven't ever noticed that at all. But he's a good scout and I like him," says he.

That made me feel just a little easier anyways.

"Well, it's no matter what you were doing over there," says she vicious. "You're not to have nothing more to do with such can-nye no more. Why can't you attend to your own business?"

"I'm just going to," says he. "You ain't ast my consent about mussing up my flower beds. What's all that rock and brick doing up in the yard?" Say, he was a sassy one!

"Since you ast me, I'll tell you. It's a fence we're going to build."

"A fence?" says he. "We got a perfectly good fence now."

"Oh, have we? Well, it ain't high enough to keep out our people from mixing with them can-nye." I wondered again what can-nye was. "I'll not have you talking with their maids."

"Is that so?" says he. "I hadn't noticed much of that going on lately," says he. "I wish it was."

"James!" says she, so mad she couldn't hardly speak. "James!" And about all she could do was to guggle in her throat and say: "James!"

"Well," says I to myself, "here's where he gets the can tied to him, all right. It don't stand to reason she'll allow that kind of talk."

Well now, they was talking about that fence. In two or three days it was easy enough to see what the Wisners was going to do: They was going to cut out the herd law and fence in their own range.

It wasn't a fence at all. It was a wall they built, day after day — a regular wall! Pretty soon it was up as high as our second-story window, and it keep on a-going. It took them weeks to finish it. When it was done it run clean from the sidewalk back to their boathouse. From our side, on the ground, you couldn't only see the top of their house, and from their side you couldn't only see the top of ours.

Well, anyway, the wall went up and we didn't stop it, because we couldn't. It was like we was living in two different worlds, with that wall between us, and that was the way they meant it. Nothing could cross from one side to the other. It was the coldest deal I ever seen one set of folks give another. And why? I couldn't figure why.

Bonnie Bell was right still and quiet. Old Man Wright he went around thoughtful for quite a while. He seen this was a insult put on him, but he didn't know what to do. At last he goes to Bonnie Bell one day, and says he:

"Sis, it's coming along kind of hot in the summer. How'd you like to go to White Sulphur or somewheres for a few months?" says he. "You're looking kind of pale now for the last few weeks," says he, "and I don't like to see it."

She turns and looks at him square in the eyes for a minute, and pointed out the window.

"With that thing going on?" says she. "I'll see them damned first!" says she.

That was the first time I ever heard Bonnie Bell cuss. I liked her for saying it, and so did her pa.

"It's a hard game we got to play, sis," says he; "but we'll play it."

She nods, and we let it go at that.

That fence ruined the street, as far as our end of it was concerned. Them that lived north of it could look on up the lake for quite a ways, but for more than a quarter of a mile down toward the park there couldn't nobody see down that part of the street at all. The papers got to talking about it, and some complaints was printed too. Old Man Wright he only sort of laughed. The papers made fun of the Wisners for building that fence — sort of treating the whole thing like a joke.

About now the campaign for alderman got busier.

Old Man Wright printed a full page in all the papers, with a picture of hisself, and saying that J. W. Wright was running for alderman in that ward. Right opposite his full-page ad was about six or eight inches, with a smaller picture of Old Man Wisner with it; and he said that Mr. David Abraham Wisner begged to submit his name as a candidate for the sufferedges for alderman in that ward. I didn't know what sufferedges was at first, but I knew what my boss was out after — it was votes, and he was liable to get 'em.

From that time on the boss was busier than he had been before. He got better acquainted over on the west side of our ward. Sometimes he wouldn't get back till midnight, but he always come home under his own steam. In his office I saw all sorts of people. He seemed to take to this alderman business natural.

Anyways he was a hard man to buck in any kind of a game. He had his own idea all the time maybe about that fence in Millionaire Row. One day he taken a little pasear down the lake front toward the head of the park, where there was some vacant land below us. He was sizing things up. Two or three weeks after he told me he'd bought that tract — the whole works, clear down to the end of the park. I don't know what he paid for it, but it must have been a lot of money.

"You see," says he, "all them people up there north of us on the row they ain't got only a little bit of land for their houses. Me, I'm going to have a place with half a mile or so of ground to it. Bonnie Bell has got to have a place to herself for to raise crocuses and other flowers," says he, "and to cultivate her Boston dog."

It was kind of hard times right then and a good many men was out of work. Old Man Wright put a lot of 'em to work on his new Bonnie Bell Addition, as he called it. He dug it up and smoothed it down and laid it out, and planted it with trees and sodded it. And then, down at the far end of it, he just puts up a high wall like the Wisners', but 'way off from it. Then we dug down along the Wisner wall.

Folks used to go along and wonder what it was done for and who done it. And later on some folks farther up the drive allowed it was some kind of a new Italian garden and some of them begun to put up them walls too. It got right fashionable. The whole looks of that part of town was changed. But, while they had little bits of yards you couldn't swing a cat in, we had land enough to start a hay ranch if we had of wanted to.

"I can afford it," says Old Man Wright.

And by the time he had the improvements started the real-estate men come and pestered him to take at least three times as much money as he give for it.

"I may sell it sometime," says he, "but not now," says he. "I like it. My girl likes to raise crocuses, and what she likes she gets. We're going to raise plenty of crocuses and tulips and hollyhocks," says he.

It wouldn't be right to say Bonnie Bell didn't have no friends. Once there come quite a bunch of girls from out of town — girls she had knew in Smith's; and they had quite a visit. They tore up the house and for a week or so Bonnie Bell was right happy; but by and by they went away again. Then nobody come into our place, the sort we wanted to come.

There was one man come to call on us — it was Henderson, of our old hotel. We used to go down there and eat sometimes, and every time we done so he'd come to stand around. He couldn't keep his eyes off Bonnie Bell. I reckon he was about forty years old.

Now one day he come up to our house in the afternoon all dressed up, with a white flower in his coat and a high hat on, and shiny shoes, and he ast for Old Man Wright; and William showed him into the back parlor. I was setting in our ranch room, so I could hear what went on — I couldn't very well help it. I heard what Mr. Henderson said; so I knowed what brought him there all dressed up.

"Mr. Wright," says he, "I won't waste time. I'm used to doing business in a direct way. So today I come down — I come down — that is to say, I come today ——" says he.

"Well, for a direct man, you're taking some time to say what you want to say," says Old Man Wright; "but maybe I can guess it if you can't say it. It's my girl you come to talk about?"

I didn't hear him say anything, but I guess he must have nodded.

"You want to ast me?" says Old Man Wright. "Why didn't you ast her?"

"I thought it better to see if you would consider me as a suitor, sir," says he. "It seemed a fairer thing."

"I don't know as a parent ought to consider any man that would ast him first," says Old Man Wright thoughtful; "but in some ways you're a good man, and square and successful."

"My profession — my business — being an innkeeper isn't exactly the highest form of business ——"

"Hell! That's got nothing to do with it," says Old Man Wright. "I imagine my girl might marry most any kind of man if he was the right sort. But now let's figure on this, Mr. Henderson," says he, "because I like you. You're some older than she is."

"Yes," says he; "old enough to know a splendid woman like Miss Wright when I see her. In my business I've seen plenty that ain't."

"That's good," says Old Man Wright. "I like to hear you say that. I don't blame you for feeling the way you do. And I feel kind to you too, sir. You're the first man that ever said a kind word to me and my girl in this town. You're almost the last, as far as that goes. You're as good as us and we're as good as you, if it comes to that. But now let's figure a little further. The man that marries my girl, marries her — there ain't a-going to be no divorce. There may be a funeral if there's trouble, but there ain't going to be no divorce for Bonnie Bell. It's death that's going to part her and her husband. You see I got to be careful about her, don't you?"

"Yes, and you ought to be. I never felt my years as a handicap."

"They ain't, in business," says Old Man Wright. "But now look-a-here: As you live along together she'll be still young when you're pretty old. Take ten or fifteen years off of you and ten or fifteen thousand cocktails, and I'd say 'God bless you!' But the years and the cocktails is there permanent. You're kind of soft around the stomach, Mr. Henderson, I'm sorry to say. Ain't you making a mistake in wanting to marry my girl at all, sir?"

I don't reckon he was happy; yet he certainly was game.

"Mr. Wright," says he at last, "that's why I come to you first! I was conscious of them ten million cocktails — it's nearer ten million than ten thousand, I reckon, in my business. It seemed to me fairer to talk to you first. I'm not apt to forget her very soon — I'm not apt to look at any woman at all. I reckon I don't want to get married if I can't marry her. Maybe it ain't fair for a man at my time of life and way of life to think of marrying a girl like her. I reckon I been selfish. I reckon maybe you set me right."

"Where did you come from?" says Old Man Wright.

"The South," says he.

"I know that; but what state?"

"Kentucky," says he. "I been living here a great many years."

"You're a gentleman, Mr. Henderson," says Old Man Wright. "I wisht things wasn't just the way they are. But now, on the level, do you think we'd better say anything to Bonnie Bell at all about this here?"

Henderson must have thought it over quite a while. Then I heard him take a step or so. Maybe he picked up his hat. Maybe his cane knocked against a chair. Maybe they shook hands.

"I don't want to do anything that isn't best for her," says he at last. "I reckon maybe I ain't a good-enough man to marry her. I reckon maybe you're right, sir," says he.

Old Man Wright he don't talk no more for a little while. I heard them walk toward the door.

"No," says he at length. "Mr. Henderson, I don't reckon we'll say anything about this to Bonnie Bell after all. Good-by, sir. I wish I could ast you to come here often."

"Good-by," says he.

I seen him go down the walk after a while. He forgot all about his car waiting by the sidewalk and walked half a block before he come to. Of course, he couldn't come to see us no more after that.

As for me, I didn't have no friends either. Jimmie the hired man was about the only friend around there I cared much for, and now he was gone — fired, I supposed. Times got even lonesomer than ever.

Bonnie Bell come in the room where I was setting one day, and she set down on the lounge and put her chin in her hand and taken a look out the window. I ast her what was up.

"Well," says she, "I was just wondering about the seeds for them big flower beds we've been making," says she. "I'll be wanting to plant them next spring, at least. If I had some experienced man that knew about flowers now ——"

"Why don't you go down to the park," says I, "and talk to some of them Dutch gardeners that raises the flower beds down there? They'll know all about them things," says I.

"Curly," says she, "you're only a cowpuncher, ain't you?"

"That's all," says I.

"Well, that accounts for you not having no sense at all," says she.

X

US BEING ALDERMAN

REALLY, that fence must of hurt the Wisners as bad as it done anybody else. Us having plenty of ground, our house wasn't built so close to the line as theirs was. The fence must of cut off more light for them than it did for us. Besides, when you looked at it from the street, unless you lived around there and knowed about it, you'd of thought it was us built that fence to spite them and not them to spite us.

Old Man Wright was running on what they called the Independent ticket that fall; there was three parties and the town was all tore up. Of course everybody knows there oughtn't to be but just two parties — Republicans and Democrats. Me being from Texas, original, I don't see why anybody should be anything but a Democrat; but Old Man Wright he had a way of picking out things.

Well, they held the election along in November. I might of knowed how it would come out. They ain't done counting all the Wright votes yet over in that ward of ours. At about half past six they'd had time enough to count all the sufferedges that Old Man Wisner taken down in the silk-stocking part of that ward.

At about half past three in the afternoon the papers come out with bulletins and says the ward was "conceded to Wright." I should say it was conceded! I conceded it, anyways, as soon as I knowed he wanted to run.

Well, sir, it was more like old times then than we'd seen since we moved in there — like the times when we was sher'f in the Yellow Bull country. The old man he come in a-laughing along about suppertime and under his own steam, and says he:

"Bonnie Bell, your pa is going to be high in the nation's councils right soon, because he is going to be alderman in one of the most important wards in this here town. I may be mayor some day; and when you're mayor you're due to chirk up and think of being president — if you are a humorist. Also, your pa is hungry. Please get Curly and me all the ham shanks and greens they is in the house.

"And, besides," says he when Bonnie Bell was going out, "pull the front door wide open tonight. Take the lock out and hide William where they can't any of my horny-handed friends find him. They'll be in here tonight, a bunch of them, to sort of celebrate our glorious victory. There may be several bands along in here — I hope and trust so. I shorely am fond of music and I like bands. Whenever I get elected sher'f or anything I want the band to play — all the bands they is."

Well, that was some night! I was glad for once we had come to Chicago, for there is more bands in a town that size than there is in Cody.

Old Man Wright he was more natural than I'd ever saw him for a long while. I don't know if it was quite fair the way he done, because it ain't held Christian to set on a man when he's down. But what he done was to get that Dutch band with five pieces that played in front of our house every morning — they come in first. He stations them at the side of the road right square in front of Old Man Wisner's house, and he tells them to play everything they knew and then play it all over again, and keep on playing. We was setting eating dinner, enjoying their music as much as we could, when the leader of the band comes in; and says he:

"*Mein Herr, wir sind schon ausgeblasen.*"

"Is that so?" says Old Man Wright. "Well, have a drink, and go out and begin over again."

About now come the rest of the bands, six or eight or so, and back of them was the merry villagers. They filled up the whole street in front of our steps and in front of the Wisners, and up and down the row; and some of 'em stepped on Bonnie Bell's new tulip beds in the yard south of us.

"Unto them that hath is gave," says Old Man Wright, looking peaceful. "Like enough, most all the bands in this part of town'll be here before long. Pore old Dave Wisner, he don't seem to have no band; so I'll fix him up — he don't seem cheerful, with his blinds down thataway. Round up our bands, Curly," says he, "and line some of 'em up in front of his house on the other side of the street. Get some of 'em and stand 'em up on our side of his fence. Make a line of 'em back to the boathouse. Tell 'em to play — I ain't particular what they play. They don't even need to play the same piece unless they want to; but keep 'em busy — play everything they have and then repeat softly, and if they get tired feed 'em and give 'em something to drink. And tell Johnson, the precinct captain, when he comes about eight o'clock, to come on in with his friends, the whole gang — the door is open and there's no strings on it, and no strings on the new alderman."

Old Man Wisner must have been enjoying his life that evening while we was celebrating our being alderman. Bonnie Bell she didn't approve of this none, but she knowed that when her pa was in one sort of mood she'd better leave him alone and let him have his way — there wasn't no stopping him.

After a while Johnson, the precinct captain that had had this election in charge, he come in to have a talk with the new alderman, him and a lot more. There was a good many Swedes up in his ward, and plenty of these folks was blue-eyed and had yellow hair, and some of 'em had long whiskers. On the whole they carried their liquor pretty well, and they had plenty. Old Man Wright was in his shirt sleeves — rolled up so that his freckles would show — and he had two or three cases of red liquor, and not a cork in the room!

"So far as Sunday closing is concerned," says he, "it ain't Sunday yet."

They taken something with the new alderman and hollered for a speech.

"Men," says he, "we licked 'em like I said we would — only more. I don't ast any of you to show me how to make any more money, for I've got enough. We made this fight on the Lake Electric Ordinance. The intention of the other gang was to hold up all you people that has homes of your own. Every one of you has to use electric light. It's only right you ought to pay a fair price, but nothing more. Let me tell you that's all you're going to pay. I've bought into that company, and me and my bank crowd can run it. Let me tell you the prices will be right: don't you worry about that none at all. For once you'll get a square deal here; or if you don't, then elect some other man the next time."

"Hooray for our new alderman!" says Johnson, jumping up then.

They all jumps up too. They had their glasses in their hands — plenty of men standing there in our ranch room, rather big men with yellow whiskers, a good many.

About then Bonnie Bell she comes down the front stairs. She was all dressed up in silk, in a low-necked dress and a good many jewels on. You wouldn't hardly of thought it was her pa standing in his shirt sleeves in the room.

"Gentlemen," says Old Man Wright, "this is my daughter."

What them men did was not to compare them two at all. They just stood in line and every one of 'em raised his glass like she was a real queeen; and they give her three cheers. Bonnie Bell she drops them a curtsy.

You see, them folks saw that, while we had the price and had the class, and could play some games, we was just folks. They felt all the time that they was just folks too. When you can play that game square and on the level, like Old Man Wright done, they can't beat you in politics.

Them people went away at last — even our little Dutch band, though they give up hard. The Wisner house was dark, while ours was all lit up — everything in it, including me, Curly. The papers said that the new alderman kept open house until a late hour. There was some truth in that — the door was open all night long.

At breakfast Old Man Wright was hungry, though he hadn't been to bed. He set, with his hands in his pockets, and looked out at Wisner's brick wall; and says he to me:

"This here is going to be a changed ward. I ain't in no man's vest pocket. I ain't done yet. This is just the beginning. But where's the kid, Curly?"

I went and found her. William was still hid somewhere — the night's doings had grieved him plenty. She come in and set down by her pa.

"Well, sis," says he, "you see your dad is getting some of them Better Things we come to Chicago after."

"Dad," says she, pushing back a little way from him and looking into his face, "tell me something."

"What is it, Honey?"

"The truth now — the truth."

"Yes, Honey."

"Did you sell out the Circle Arrow and come to town on account of me?"

He didn't speak at first.

"Yes, I did, Honey," says he at last. "I said I'd tell you the truth. That was why we sold the old ranch — so as you could come here. I wanted you to go as high as any American woman could go. We educated you for that — we brought you up for it, Curly and me."

"We didn't win, did we, dad?" says she, slow like. "How is it done, dad?"

"Gawd knows," he says. "Tell me, sis, if we pulled out of here and went to some other town, would you be better? How about Kansas City?"

"No," says she. "Our feet ain't headed that way. I won't quit, dad."

"You'll break your heart first, and your dad's?"

"Yes, if necessary."

"All to break into them sepulchers?"

"No," says she; "there's a lot of things worth while more than that. These brick-and-stone houses are the trenches. They may be hard to take. But back of them lies the country, and it's the country that's worth while. You found it — over on the other side of the ward. For me — don't mind if I haven't found it just yet."

"Ain't you happy, sis?" says he.

"No," says she, quiet like; "I'm not."

He pats her on the back.

"Get out of doors," says he. "Do something — work at something! Look upwards and outside, and don't get to looking inwards," says he. "That ain't the way. Think what's in the fields beyond."

"Life, dad," says she, slow; and it seemed to me like she was sad. "Life!"

"Life?" says he. "Sis, what do you mean? Tell your old dad, can't you?"

She told him, then. She put her haid down on his neck.

"Oh," says she, "it's all right for you two — you've got something to do — you can work and fight; but what can I do? What is there for me to do in all the world? And you tried so hard to make me happy!"

"And you ain't happy?" says her pa.

"Dad!" says she. "Dad!" And she went on crying down his neck.

Ain't women hell? I went on away.

XI

US AND THE FREEZE-OUT

MORE and more folks begun to talk about us and our place since we got to be alderman. Of course more and more people begun to come in and visit with us now; but not one from Millionaire Row, though, if I do say it, we had the best-looking place now in the whole row of houses.

It was one of Bonnie Bell's ideas to make one of them sunken gardens, which she said was always done in Italy.

"I'll tell you," says she; "we'll build our sunken garden right up against Old Man Wisner's wall. How would it do to plant a few ivy vines to run up the side of the wall, dad?" she ast her pa.

"Why, all right," says he; "but you be mighty careful not to plant any olive branches."

So Bonnie Bell and me we was busy quite a while making plans for this here sunken garden. We read all the books we could find; still, she wasn't happy.

"I need some skilled gardener in this," says she; "them Dutch down at the park are no good at all. I wonder where the Wisners' gardener went."

"That fellow wasn't so much," says I to Bonnie Bell.

"What makes you say that, Curly?" says she.

"Well, I heard him talking one morning and I didn't like it. For that matter, I didn't like the way he talked about you neither. I told him we couldn't have nothing to do with the lower classes — let alone now, when we're alderman, we couldn't do that. He was fired and he ought to of been."

"How did you come to know all this, Curly?" says she.

"I heard him down at the boathouse talking to Old Lady Wisner. I think we're mighty well shut of the whole bunch of them — though I will say he was learning to rope all right, and I could of made a cowhand out of him if I'd had time."

"What did she say, Curly?" she asked me then. "Did she really talk about us?"

"Yes, she did. She thought you was a hired girl. And she says we was can-nye, and he wasn't to mix with us. Can-nye — what is can-nye, Bonnie?" says I.

She got red in the face and was shore mad at something.

"Can-nye, eh!" says she. "Can-nye! So that's what she thinks we are."

"Well, that was before we was alderman," says I.

"Maybe they think different now, whatever can-nye is. What is it, anyway?"

"It means something common, vulgar and low down, Curly," says she.

"That wasn't no bouquet, then, was it?" says I. "Well, I didn't think so then, though I never heard it called to nobody in my life. I made it plain, though, to that hired man that he didn't have no chance to break into our house."

"Did he want to come over, Curly?" she ast.

"Crazy to! He wanted to get a look in our ranch room. I told you he was hankering to be a cow-puncher."

"Well, why didn't you bring him over if he was trying to learn things you could teach him?"

"What! Me bring him in our place? I reckon not! Now look here, kid," says I, "you don't half know how good-looking you are."

"I'm not," says she. "I got a freckle right on my nose. It don't come off neither."

"Well, maybe one freckle or so," says I; "but that don't kill off your looks altogether. Let me tell you, when it comes to common people like him talking your name out in public, why, it don't go!" says I. "Besides, another thing"—I went on talking to her right plain. "Look at the money you'll come into sometime! He has got to show me a-plenty what right he had to say you was wonderfully beautiful. You are, kid — but what business was it of his?"

"He has been gone four months and eight days," says she, thoughtful.

"How do you know he has? Do you keep a calendar on folks like him?"

"No; I was just thinking," says she, "that if he was here I might ask him about my sunken garden."

"That would be fine, wouldn't it?" says I. "But then, come to think of it, he wasn't in favor of that fence hisself. He was right free-spoken; I'll say that for him."

"He didn't like that fence idea?"

"Of course he didn't. He knew it wasn't right."

"Well," says she, "I'm going to plant ivy on it. If it runs over the top of the wall and hangs down on their side I'm not going to try to stop it."

Now, why she said that I never could figure out at all. I suppose women is peacefuller than men.

The folks in the ward where we live at they allowed their new alderman was on the square. I reckon it must of been them freckles. There ain't no way of beating a man in politics that has freckles and that can carry his liquor. So by and by all the papers come out and begun to say maybe Mr. John William Wright would be a candidate for treasurer next election. That is about as high as you can get in city politics. Treasurers make a heap more than their salaries usual in any large town. The people don't seem to mind it neither.

Times out on the range wasn't so good now as they might of been. Them high benches along the mountains never was made for farming. The new settlers that had come in under our old patents, through this here Yellow Bull Colonization and Improvement Company, they was shore having hard sledding along of their having believed everything they seen in the papers. They'd allowed they was going into the Promised Land. It was — but it wasn't nothing else but a promise.

It was Old Man Wisner's fault really. Though, after his usual way in side lines, he never showed his hand, he was deep in that company hisself. It was him now that had to hold the thing together. The settlers got sore and some of them quit, and most of them didn't pay their second or third payments. Of course that didn't make no difference, so far as we was concerned, for the Yellow Bull Colonization and Improvement Company had to make their deferred payments just the same to us. But when the company's money run out, and they maybe had to assess the stockholders, some of the stockholders got almighty cold feet.

"Well, Colonel," says I, "I reckon we'll get back our ranch some of these days, won't we? I shore wish we would."

"So do I, Curly; but I'm afraid not," says he.

"Why not?" I ast him.

"Well, it's Old Man Wisner — that's the reason," says he. "You see, it's his money that they are working with now," says he. "Their new ditch has cost them more than four times what the engineer said it would — a ditch always does. They've been wasting the water, like grangers always do, and they're fighting among themselves. These States people has to learn how to farm all over again when they go out into that sort of country. As to them pore stockholders, I reckon you could buy them out right cheap; but, cheap or not, Old Man Wisner's in more than he ever thought he'd be," says he.

"Ain't you going to let the old man off on none of them deferred payments?" says I, grinning.

"I am, of course, Curly," says he, solemn. "Seeing what he has done for us, I'm just hankering for some chance of doing him a kindness!" says he.

I begun to believe that before this here game was all played there'd be some fur flying between them two old hes, neither of which was easy to make quit.

XII

US AND A ACCIDENTAL FRIEND

BONNIE BELL she was busy, after her little little ways, fixing her garden or laying out her flower beds, or reading, or studying about pictures. She drove her electric brougham a good deal, riding around.

She was riding along one day in the park below our house when she seen a girl go riding by, with some others and a young man or two, on horseback, bouncing along bumpety-bump, rising up every jump as though the saddle hurt 'em. One of the girls was on a mean horse, but she was going pretty well and didn't seem to mind it. But this horse he taken a scare at a automobile that was letting off steam, and, first thing you know, up went the horse in front and the girl got a fall.

There wasn't any of them very good riders, and this horse, being a bad actor, scared the others. They all bolted off, not seeming to know that this girl had fell off. She lit on her head.

Bonnie Bell seen all this happen, and she gets out of her car on the keen lope and runs over to where the girl is and picks her up. Her and a policeman took her in Bonnie Bell's brougham. She didn't know nothing yet, being jolted some on the head.

Now that girl was pretty as a picture herself, with light hair and blue eyes, and kind of a big mouth. She was smiling even when she didn't know a thing. She was always smiling. She was dressed like she had lots of money; and she was fixed for riding — boots and some sort of pants.

Bonnie Bell couldn't bring her to and she concludes to take her home to our house. First thing I know, there she was outside, hollering for me.

"Come here quick, Curly!" says she. "Come help me carry her into the house."

So I helped her. The girl still had her quirt in her hand and she was kind of white.

"Who is she, Bonnie Bell?" says I; and she says she didn't know, and tells me to go and get a doctor.

But while I was getting William to telephone — I couldn't use them things much myself — the girl comes to, all right; and she sets up and rubs her head.

"Oh, what do you know about that!" says she. "He got me off. I thank you so much. Which way did he go?" she ast.

"He was headed to the riding-school barn," says Bonnie Bell, "the last I saw of him. Your friends were all going the same way. So I thought the best thing I could do was to bring you here till you felt better."

I don't reckon the girl was hurt bad, she being young; and such girls is tough.

"Well," says she, "it certainly was nice of you. And how am I to thank you?" She kissed Bonnie Bell then for luck. "You're nice," says she, "and I like you."

Bonnie Bell, if you'll believe me, was kind of timid and scared, with it being so long since any woman had said a kind word to her. She didn't hardly know what to say, at first, till the girl kissed her again.

"I am Katherine Kimberly," says she. "We live just above the park. Where is this?"

"This is just above the park too," says Bonnie Bell — "on the boulevard. This is Mr. John William Wright's place," says she, "and I'm Miss Wright. Can I serve some tea to you?" So she calls William.

When William brings in the tea them two set up and begun to talk right sociable. This here Kimberly girl she rubbed her head once in a while, but she wasn't hurt much along of having so much hair to fall on her head with. The tea fixed her all right.

"I hit my coco a jolt!" says she. "Gee! I was going some. I'll never ride that long-legged old giraffe again; he's nothing but a dog after all — not that

I'm afraid, but I don't like him," says she. "Do you ride?"

"Would you like to come and see my horses?" says Bonnie Bell. "If you like horses ——"

"Do I like them? I'm crazy over them! Can you ride?"

"Oh, some," says Bonnie Bell. "Curly says I can."

"Curly?" And she looks at me.

"He's our foreman," says Bonnie Bell. "Talk to him if you want to know about riding — he's a rider."

"I was once, ma'am," says I, "but not no more. I wouldn't get on a mean horse now for a thousand dollars. I'm scared of horses, ma'am; but she ain't" — meaning Bonnie Bell. "She still thinks she can ride any of 'em."

"Yes," says Bonnie Bell; "and, as far as that goes, if I could get you to come with me I would always ride a horse and not go in a car or boat."

"Boat?" says Miss Kimberly. "Oh, of course you have 'em too."

"Come down," says Bonnie Bell, "and you and I can look at my horses and boat and things. After that I'll take you home."

"Oh, may I go?" says this Katherine girl. "You see, I suppose I must get home before they tell mommah."

Well, she hadn't more than got out on our porch than she knew in a minute where she was. This was where she showed she was a lady born and a good girl too. She never let on beyond that first look — she seen she had been brought into the house of us can-nyes. This was the house with the wall, where nobody of the Row ever went.

"How lovely it is!" says she. "Do you know you have the nicest place on this whole street? It's tasteful. I like this little sunken garden — it's a dear! And see how the ivy grows on the wall! And over there's the boathouse. May I see your things?"

Now what she said last wasn't any bluff. It was just the girl in her talking to another girl. I seen Bonnie Bell give her another look, kind of asting like — she herself was free and friendly every way; but she hadn't been used to this right along lately. So she looks at this Katherine Kimberly right close for about half a second, till she seen she was on the square.

Then this Kimberly girl puts her arm round Bonnie Bell. That was the way them two went down to the boathouse — their arms around one another. When they come back, in about ten minutes or so, they was talking so fast neither one of them could of heard what the other was saying.

"Oh, my goodness!" says Katherine after a little. "I must be going home. It isn't far, you know."

"Yes; I know," says Bonnie Bell, quiet.

"And you said you'd take me home in your car?"

"And you want me to?" says Bonnie Bell, kind of funny.

"I wish you would — if you will. Of course I could walk."

"Does your head hurt now?" ast Bonnie Bell.

The girl looked at her straight. Then I knew she was on the square.

"No, it don't," says she; "but I'd like it if you would take me home in your car," says she. "I want you to come in and meet my mommah. We want to come down here if you'll let us, all of us. Will you let us? Will you let us, Bonnie?" says she.

Now, aint it funny how much can happen quiet and easy? I expect more had happened for Bonnie Bell this last hour or so than had in a whole year before — and all by accident, like most good things comes to us. Not a woman in that block had ever called on Bonnie Bell and it didn't look like they ever would. We wasn't on the map — even me, that ain't got any brains at all, knowed that.

And yet I could tell that if Bonnie Bell Wright drove along the front of that block with Katherine Kimberly in her car, and they got off at the Kimberlys' and went in — and if the Kimberlys come up to our house, too — why, then I knowed we was on the map. I don't think Bonnie Bell cared. What was in her heart was mostly gladness at meeting some girl friend she could talk to right free.

Of course, living there so long, I couldn't help knowing some of the things along the Row. I knowed there was a sort of a fight there as to which was the queen of Millionaire Row, which was the same as being the queen of the society of this here city of Chicago. Either it was this Mrs. Henry D. Kimberly or else it was Mrs. David Abraham Wisner. The Kimberlys was in wholesale leather, while the Wisners was in wholesale beef and pork, and them things. Most everybody in the Row, it seemed to me, had something to do with a cow, one shape or another, except us — which, dealing with cows on the hoof, might of been said to be at the bottom of the whole game. But that ain't respectable, like I told you. Sausage or hides or leather is better — especial if wholesale.

Bonnie Bell was quiet. She taken up the collar of this Katherine girl and looks at the little pin she wore on it.

"What year was yours?" says she.

"Last June," says Katherine.

Then I seen they was both scholars of that same Old Man Smith, where Bonnie Bell had went to school. They had on some sort of pins so they knew each other, like Masons. Not having nothing better to do, they kissed each other again.

By the time Bonnie Bell had drove over to the Kimberlys' house folks had found Katherine's horse, but not her; so her ma was scared silly, natural enough. When she seen her long-lost daughter coming with Bonnie Bell, both of them able to walk and talk, she was right glad, and fell on the necks of both of them, weeping some.

"And who is this young lady," says she, meaning Bonnie Bell, "who has been so kind as to bring you home to your mother?"

And she smiled at Bonnie Bell, her being the second woman to do that in Chicago in two years. You see, if a girl is handsome women mostly hate her; the men don't — which is why.

"This is our neighbor, Miss Wright, mommah," says Katherine. "They live just below us a little way."

She got red in the face then, for everybody on the street there knew about us and the high fence; yet nobody knew us personal. But Katherine's ma was different from most of these other people. Besides, you only needed one good look at Bonnie Bell to see that she wasn't any common folks.

"She left Smith the year before I went in, mommah," says Katherine, "and she's in my sororyety;

and she's been here ever since they built their fine house; and she's a dear and I love her." Katherine had a way of talking all in one breath, like a sprinter running a hundred yards flat. "I want you to love her, too," says she to her ma.

And then Old Lady Kimberly she taken Bonnie Bell in her arms and kissed her some more; and the kid, like enough, come near to spilling over then.

"Come right in and have a cup of tea," says she.

So they went into the house, and the Kimberlys' sad man, which was named William, too, brought them some tea. They didn't need it none, because they was full of it already; but women can hold plenty of tea. When they was drinking that and, like enough, all three of them talking at once, Katherine tells her ma all about how she got threw from her horse, and how Bonnie Bell saved her life and carried her home and took care of her, and now brought her back.

"Mommah, their place is lovely," says she. "They've all sorts of nice things and we're going to call as soon as Bonnie Bell will let us."

"Yes, indeed," says her ma, who was going to back any play her girl made.

"Bonnie Bell," says she—"that is a odd name and a very pretty one."

Bonnie Bell laughed at that.

"It's one my dad gave me," says she. "My real name is Mary Isabel. My dad always called me Bonnie Bell; and so did Curly."

"Curly?" says the old lady, not knowing who that was — me.

"Oh, Curly's a dear," says Katherine then. "He's a cowboy, or was when he was younger; but he isn't young now. And he can ride any sort of horse living, and rope things — I think he must be the stableman."

"Indeed he isn't," says Bonnie Bell. "He's our foreman."

They didn't know what that was, being city people; so she told them. Them Kimberlys couldn't see why they took me to the city when they didn't have no cows. I reckon they must of talked of me and Old Man Wright plenty — you see, Bonnie Bell told me of it like it happened. She told me what Katherine's ma wore and what their William looked like, and what sort of pictures was on the walls. Womanfolks can see more than a man and remember it better.

Well, sir, it wasn't any more than a week before Old Lady Kimberly drove up to our house in her car; and she come right up the walk herself and didn't send in any of them little cards that says: "Tag; you're It."

She come into our parlor, and our William went out and got Bonnie Bell for her, and them two must of had a regular visit, because Katherine's ma insisted on seeing our ranch room, which pleased her mighty much. She said she certainly was going to bring her husband over, because he would be crazy over it.

"Tell me," says she—"when can we come?"

"Why," says Bonnie Bell, "in a real ranch there isn't a time of the day or night when you can't come and be welcome. Everybody's welcome at a ranch, you know."

Old Lady Kimberly, she seemed kind of thoughtful over that; but she didn't say nothing about being slow starting. Says she:

"If you'd let us come we'd all be so glad to come and sit in your ranch room—it's new to us and we like it. I know my husband would like it very much. As for Katherine, I don't think I'll be able to keep her away after this."

Well, that afternoon, late, Katherine calls up on the telephone again—about the eighth time she had already that day—and she ast might her pa and ma and her come over that evening to see our ranch room. Of course Bonnie Bell told them to come.

"Well, what do you know, Curly?" says she to me. "This ain't according to Hoyle. Mrs. Kimberly ought to of waited till I returned her call, and till maybe one or the other of us had invited the other to a reception, or to a dinner or something."

"What's a reception?" says I.

"Something we never had yet, Curly," says she.

"It's a place where people ain't happy; but there's plenty of 'em. Maybe tonight is the closest we've come to it."

Well, they all came that night, all three of 'em — twicet in one day, which was going pretty strong; and, like enough, something they hadn't never done before in all their lives.

"No you don't!" says Mrs. Kimberly when Bonnie Bell was going to take 'em into the parlor. "We're going right into the ranch room and sit there, all of us — mayn't we, please?"

So they come in and Old Man Kimberly he walked around and looked through the place; and he was like a kid.

"By golly, Wright!" says he. "I didn't know a alderman could have as much sense as this," says he. "This is the real goods," says he — "you can set down in one of those chairs and not break its legs off. And here's tobacco handy, and matches all over the place. Now over in the club all you get is a place to smoke and a big chair, and a fireplace to look into. Ain't a city a cold old place, John Wright?" says he.

"Well, you see," says Old Man Wright by and by — "you see, folks get to be pretty busy with one thing and another. I know they all mean right well," says he, "but they get so busy in a town like this they don't have time for anything."

That was about all that ever was said about our being neighbors on our street. Nobody apologized for not having done this or that. We just dropped in like we'd always been doing that way.

"Well, Alderman," says Old Man Kimberly after a time, "you certainly know how to live. I'm going to drop in here every day or so, evenings, because I can't get a match at the club without calling a boy, and here you can just reach out and get plenty."

"Come in as often as you like, neighbor," says my boss; and he fills his own pipe and passes the fine-cut.

Sometimes I think, after all, folks is a good deal alike inside, and what makes good in one place will in another. We used these people like we was all out on the Yellow Bull; and here was Old Man Kimberly feeling better than he had in two years and all of 'em glad to come back to our place. Which all happened right soon — and because of them two girls.

"Well," says Katherine's pa after a while, "if I had to choose I believe I'd rather be a ranchman out West than anything in the world. Tell me — what made you sell out and come East to live? Why couldn't you be content where you was at?"

"Well," says my boss, kind of smiling crooked out of the end of his mouth, "we come East to get some of the Better Things."

They looked then, both of 'em, over at the two young girls on the sofa. They was so busy talking they didn't know anybody was looking at 'em. When we was all quiet they both spoke out right at the same time. "I got mine at Madeleine's," Katherine was saying; and Bonnie Bell says: "We fry ours in butter." The Lord only knows what they'd been talking about; but it didn't make no difference.

Well, anyways, we all had quite a fine time, setting there in our ranch room, with the smoky mantelpiece and the old tables and chairs, and the sofa covered with a hide, where the two girls was setting.

By and by they all got up and said they had to go home. Old Man Kimberly he held out his hand to my boss, and they shook hands quite a while together, not saying very much.

"Will you come over some evening?" he ast Old Man Wright.

And he says:

"Shore!"

About then Katherine's ma was kissing Bonnie Bell some more — she seemed never to get tired of kissing Bonnie Bell. Then them two girls they walks off to the front door, their arms around each other. I seen 'em standing there under the light. By and by Katherine picks up Bonnie Bell's hand and looks it over, and there wasn't no rings on it.

"Are you engaged yet, Bonnie?" she ast.

Bonnie Bell kind of blushed at that.

"No," says she. "Are you?"

"No. Mommah says I'm too young," says she; "but then ——"

"Yes," says Bonnie Bell; "but then ——"

Old Man Wright he turns to me after they'd all went away.

"Well, Curly," says he, thoughtful, "I reckon we're coming on."

"Yes," says I; "but then ——"

XIII

THEM AND THE RANGE LAW

WHEN they all went home us three set quite a while in our ranch room, looking at the fire. It wasn't winter yet, but sometimes we lit the fire in the fireplace. Old Man Wright he seemed to be thinking of something, or trying to. At last he says:

"Sis, go get the fine-toothed comb and comb your pa's head — won't you, sis?" says he.

"Can't your barber do that for you?" ast she.

"He does; but no barber can really comb a alderman's head soothing," says he, "not like his own kid can. Now a alderman that's soothed proper might be induced to do almost anything, and combing him on his head is like scratching a pig along its back with a cob. You try it, kid; it might be perductive of a new car or something for you," says he.

So then she gets the comb and begins for to comb his head some, and he goes on talking with me. Evident he had something on his mind; that was the way he'd got used to think when something hard come up.

"Curly," says he to me after a while, "what would you say if we had a chance to buy in the Circle Arrow Ranch again?"

"I'd say it was the finest thing in the world," says I. "Them grangers ain't got a chance on earth. It takes a long course for to learn how to understand a cow's mind," says I.

"That's what they call sikeology in Smith," says Bonnie Bell.

"Well," says I, "you can't get no course in cow sikeology in no four years; it takes more than that on the range, like your pa and me done. They can't raise nothing out there in the Yellow Bull but cows, and they don't know how to raise them. Colonel," says I, "ain't them deferred payments deferring all right?"

"Some," says he. "They didn't pay nothing this year yet and it's way past due. Looks like there might be some trouble in there, don't it?"

"Well then," says Bonnie Bell, "where does that leave us? Look at this place; look at all our expense." She stopped combing then.

"Don't worry about that," says her pa. "We've made plenty of money other ways than that. For instance, I got a offer right now to sell out all our land below here toward the park for about three times what we paid for it. The Second Calvary Regiment wants to put up a barracks, or a armory or something, in there. Also, a French milliner wants in, just below here."

"What!" says Bonnie Bell. "That would ruin the whole Row. What do you mean by that?"

"Huh!" says her pa. "That's what they all say. Old Man Wisner was crazy when he heard something about it — he was going to get out a injunction. I hope he'll try it; for he can't. Seems like most of the things he's been trying on us he couldn't make go."

"Well, dad, I don't believe I'd like that barracks on our land either. Suppose we all think it over a little bit."

"All right," says he. "There may be other ways of having fun with Dave. I just thought of that one. Oh, well, I bought the lot north of them, and I'm thinking of putting a Old People's Home in there," says he. "Across the street from there I'm thinking of putting up a statue of Kaiser Wilhelm; some of my constituents they would come there Sunday and hold services," says he.

"Anything else you got on your mind, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Well, I just seen a chance to make a little speculation in a moving-picture company," says he. "I didn't put in much — only two, three hundred thousand dollars; but I didn't know but what it might make some money after a while. How would you like to be a actor man in our company, Curly?" says he. "The worst it could do would be to spoil a puncher that never was much good anyhow."

"No," says I; "it's too much like work."

"Well, we could make other pictures," says he, smiling contented. "For instance, we could set up two or three cameras right acrost the street from Old Man Wisner's 'most any morning. Then, when Old Man Wisner come out we could take his picture and show him how he looks when he has got a grouch. Or we could take a picture of the old lady getting in her car or getting out. Neither one of 'em has got much girlish figure now.

"Why, there's loads of pictures that we could take. If you didn't like to work much riding or anything in the movies," says he, "you could be taken leaning kind of careless on our gate and looking over the Wisners' fence — for instance, talking to their hired man. . . . Don't you dig my head no more, kid," says he. "I ain't no bomb-proof, like you think."

"Dad," says Bonnie Bell, "I ain't going to comb your head no more."

"Why?" says he.

"You're a mean and revengeful old man," says she. "It ain't right for us to treat our neighbors thataway," says she, "and I won't have it."

"I'm living up to my laws," says he, calm. "I've got to hand Wisner what he's trying to hand to me. You know the law that's been good enough for us. That's the range law."

"This ain't the range," says she.

"Ain't it?" says he. "This looks like a ranch house some. If you'll run your comb along over my dome, too, you'll find, unless I'm awful mistaken, something like the head of a cowman. Feel with your thumb good, Bonnie Bell," says he. "See if you can find any soft spot in there, like in a melon. See if you can find any place where it feels like I was going to lay down and let any yellow-livered son-of-a-gun try to ride me, and me not resent it," says he. "They started this and it's got to be finished — that's the law. Believe me, one way or the other, that old white-face over there is going to be a good oxen sometime, and he'll come up and feed outen my hand."

Bonnie Bell she quits combing and goes over and sets down on the lounge, and don't say nothing; nor me neither. We both knew about the old man when he started after anybody. He was that kind of a sher'f. It didn't look peaceful none to me what might happen now.

"Lock, stock and barrel?" says he to himself. "Lock, stock and barrel — that's the way we done. I dislike the color of their hair and eyes. Lock, stock and barrel," says he, "they got to settle! I don't want no truck with Dave Wisner, nor his old lady, nor their ox, nor their ass, nor their manservant, nor their maidservant, nor the stranger inside their gates — everything north of that fence is hostile to us and everything south of it is hostile to them. There's no crossing."

"Their maidservant and their manservant, dad?" says Bonnie Bell.

"You heard me!"

"What's their maidservant or their manservant got to do with it, dad?" ast she. She was setting on the lounge now, with the fine-tooth comb in her hand.

"He'd better not have nothing to do with it," said Old Man Wright. "Curly, you're foreman — see to it that not one of them crosses the line."

"All right, Colonel," says I; "orders is orders."

XIV

HOW THEIR HIRED MAN COME BACK

THERE was only one thing kept that armory from going up right on our flower beds. The weak side of Old Man Wright was, he couldn't help doing anything a woman ast him to do. This Katherine girl, one day she comes down to our place, with the paper in her hand, and she says to him:

"Look here, Colonel Wright," says she, "what's in the paper! Is that true?"

"If it ain't true," says he, "it may be before long."

"Why, Colonel Wright," says she, looking at him with her eyes wide open — and when she looked at you thataway couldn't no man help liking her — "I wisht you wouldn't do that, sir — please!" says she.

"Why not?" says he.

"Well," says she, "because."

He turns around and throws up both hands. He never said another word about it after that. But after a while the calvary regiment went somewheres else — on some more land he had bought, so it turned out. Nobody knew what changed his mind. It was Katherine, the first girl friend that Bonnie Bell had had in the city.

You see, Katherine used to come to our house regular now; her and Bonnie Bell was right thick together. One time Katherine come in quite excited.

"My brother Tom's coming back next week," says she. "Ain't that fine?"

"Is that so?" says Bonnie Bell. "I'd like to see him."

"Tom's going to live with us," says Katherine, "and be in the office downtown — unless he gets married, or something of that kind. I wisht he would. Now I wisht he would get engaged. I'd like to see how he'd act. You can't guess what I'd like!"

"No," says Bonnie Bell; "I can't."

"Well, he's awfully good-looking," says Katherine. "He hasn't got much sense though. He dances and can play a mandolin, and has been around the world a good bit. He's sweet-tempered, but he smokes too much. Sometimes of mornings he's cross. But you can't guess what I'd like!"

"No; I can't," says Bonnie Bell.

Then Katherine kissed her and taken her hands.

"Why," says she, "I'd like it awfully if you and Tom could hit it off together," says she. "I think it would be lovely — perfectly lovely! Then we'd be sisters, wouldn't we?" Bonnie Bell she blushed a-plenty.

"Why, how you talk!" says she. "I've never seen your brother yet and he's never seen me."

"I've told him you're lovely," says Katherine. "I'll bring him over sometime."

"I don't know how I could allow it after what you said," says Bonnie Bell; "but if he's as nice as you I'll jump right square down his throat. Could you ask me to do anything more than that?"

They giggled, then, and held hands, and ate candy and drank tea, and talked, both with their mouths full.

"Oh, look at the Wisners' new car!" says Katherine after a while, and she run to the window.

Their car was just coming in to the sidewalk at their curb now. From where I set I could see it. Their driver opened the door and Old Lady Wisner got out; then a young man. They both went out of sight right away around the fence — you couldn't see into their yard from where we set.

The girls by this time had got so sometimes they'd talk about the Wisners. Bonnie Bell says now:

"Why don't you call on the Wisners any more?"

"Oh, because," says Katherine. "We're friendly, of course, for the families have lived in here so long;

but Mrs. Wisner and mommah haven't been very warm since the last Charity Ball business."

"I don't know about that," says Bonnie Bell.

"Oh, Lord! Yes," says Katherine. "They didn't speak for a while. You know, Honey, the Wisners are among our best people. But then, mommah's a Daughter of the Revolution and a Colonial Dame, and a Patriot Son, or something of the sort besides. Mrs. Wisner, she's only a Daughter and not a Dame; so she doesn't rank quite as high as mommah. Some said that she faked her ancestors when she come in too. Anyway, when she tried for the Dames they threw her down. Mommah was Regent or something of the Dames then too — not that I think mommah would do anything that isn't fair. But Old Lady Wisner got her back up then, and she's been hard to curry ever since. We don't try."

"Well," says Bonnie Bell, "isn't that strange? I thought everybody in the Row was friendly except — except ——"

"Except the Wisners?" laughed Katherine. "But don't you worry. There's plenty of differences in the Row. They have their fallings out. You see, they all want to be leaders."

"I know," says Bonnie Bell. "In any pack train there always had to be one old gray critter, with the bell."

"That's it!" says Katherine. "Well now, all these leaders of our best people they want to carry the bell and go on ahead. That's what Mrs. Wisner wants — and maybe mommah, though she has a different way of doing things. Mommah's a dear! So are you, Honey; and I do wish Tom and you ——"

"I was just wondering who it was got out of their car just now," says Bonnie Bell. "But the fence ——"

"Ain't the ivy pretty on your side of your fence?" says Katherine.

Bonnie Bell stood in front of her and looked at her square.

"Look here, Kitty Kimberly, you're as sweet as can be and I love you, but don't try to keep up the bluff about that fence. They built it to keep us — to keep us ——"

"Well, maybe," says Katherine. "But they can't."

"They built it to show us our place," says Bonnie Bell, brave as you like. "They didn't think that — they didn't know ——"

"It was cruel," says Katherine, red in her face now, she was so mad about it. "I'm glad you mentioned that fence — I couldn't; but all my people said it was the meanest thing ever done. It was vulgar! It was low! That's what my mommah says. We were always sorry for you, but we didn't know how —— But, Honey, I'm glad you planted the ivy on it. It shows you're forgiving."

"We're not," says Bonnie Bell. "We're far from it — at least my dad. He's awful when you cross him. He won't quit — he'll never quit!"

"We all know that," says Katherine. "Everybody in the Row does."

"I don't know how much you know," says Bonnie Bell. "I don't know how much people have talked about us."

"Well, I can tell you one thing," says Katherine. "We heard some of the talk; and I want to say that it isn't favorable to the Wisners. There are others in town besides them. Tell me, Honey, aren't you all the way American?"

"Yes," says Bonnie Bell. "I can be a Daughter of the Revolution and a Colonial Dame, and a Patriot Son, and all the rest, so far as having ancestors is concerned."

"Could you?" says Katherine. "Then I rather guess you will!"

"We go back to the Carrolls a good deal, in Maryland," says Bonnie Bell. "You see, my mother married my father and went West, and out there we didn't pay much attention to such things. I didn't know they cared so much here. But my people were first settlers and builders, and always in the army and navy."

"How perfectly dear!" says Katherine. "We'll start you in as a Daughter; that'll make Old Lady Wisner mad, but she can't help it — mommah will take care of that. Then we'll make you a Dame next — that'll help things along. And when you're in two or three more of these Colonial businesses, where the Wisners can't get — well, then I'll be more comfortable, for one.

"I don't blame your poppah for feeling savage towards the Wisners," says she after a while. "Who're the Wisners anyways? Carrolls — huh! I guess that's about as good as coming from Iowa and carrying your dinner in a pail while you're getting your start selling sausage casings in a basket. I don't think a packer's much nohow. We're in leather.

"But, good-by," says she now. "I've got to go home. I've got to tell mommah to get those papers started. Pretty soon I'll bring Tom over."

Nothing much happened around our place for a little while. I didn't see nobody from the Wisners' and I didn't care to. Kind of from force of habit I used to walk up and down the line fence once in a while, just to have a eye on it. I done that one evening and walked back towards our garridge, for it seemed to me I heard some sort of noise down that way. It wasn't far from the end of the wall that was close to the lake. I set down and waited. It seemed to me like someone was trying to break a hole through the wall. I could hear it plunk, plunk, like someone was using a chisel or crowbar, soft and easy, like he didn't want to be heard. I waited to see what would happen.

By and by I seen a brick fall out on our side of the wall. I just picked it up and set there waiting to bust in the head of anybody that come through after the brick if he couldn't explain what he was about.

The fellow on the other side kept on working. He pulled bricks out on his side now. By and by I could see light through — it wasn't right dark in the yard yet. He pulled out the bricks and made quite a little hole close to the ground.

"Hello there!" says he, soft like. "Is that you, Curly?" says he.

"Who're you and what do you want?" says I.

"I am the hired man, Jimmie," says he. "I've come back."

"The hell you have!" says I. "Well, I can't talk to you. What made you come back? Where you been?"

"Out West," says he, "on the Circle Arrow Ranch."

"What's that!" says I. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I've been working out there. I found I could rope a little and I didn't always fall off a horse. You see, the old man owns a lot in that company."

"Why didn't you tell me you was going out there?" says I. "And how come these folks to take you back?"

"They couldn't help it," he says. "I told you I had too much on them. You'd ought to see how things is going out there! They had to take me back."

"Well, what are you breaking a hole in our fence for?" says I. "Quit it! Do you want to get buried in a sunk garden, instead of on the lone prairee? Leave our fence alone."

"Your fence? It's our fence. Don't I know all about it? It was a damn shame, Curly."

"What business is it of yours?" says I to him.

"Well, I hate to see the family I work for make such fools of theirselfs." He was setting up close to the wall now, looking through. He went on talking: "If I put the bricks in again on my side, and you on yours, who'll know the hole's there?"

"We've got ivy on our side," says I. "It's green and 'most to the top of the wall. But I don't know now why you broke that hole through."

"Curly," says he, "I want to let Peanut through, so's he can have a good friendly fight with my dog once in a while. Sometimes I'll pull some of the bricks out. I reckon Peanut'll do the rest."

"Peanut'll not do no more visiting," says I; "and I've got orders not to have any sort of truck with anyone on your side of the fence."

He set quite a while quiet, and then says he:

"Is that so, Curly?" says he.

"It certainly is," I answered him. "When a thing starts, till it's settled you can't stop Old Man Wright. Sometimes he pays funeral expenses," says I, "but when anybody gets on the prod with him I never saw him show no sign of beginning to quit. He can't," says I; "none of them Wrights can."

"Do you mean they're all that way, Curly?"

"The whole kit of 'em, me included," says I, "and the servants within our gate, and our ox, and our hired girl, and all our hired men."

"Even the maidservant within your gates?" ast he of me.

"Shore!" says I. "Her especial and worst of any."

"But you don't take no hand in this war?" says he.

"That's just what I do," says I to him. "That's what a foreman's for. You'd better plug up that hole and stay on your own side of the fence."

He set quiet for a time and then he says:

"I'm darned if I do!"

"Good-by, Jimmie," says I.

"Oh, shucks!" says he. "I'll see you from time to time."

I didn't make no answer but to put the bricks back in the hole on our side.

Now for reasons of my own, not wanting to rile Old Man Wright, I didn't say nothing to him about this hole in the fence. Neither did I say anything to Bonnie Bell about the hired man having came back; because she was doing right well the last day or so, brighter and more cheerful than she had been. That, of course, was because of what Katherine'd told her about her brother Tom. Any girl likes to hear about a young man coming around, of course. Far as any of us could tell, Tom Kimberly might be all right.

Bonnie Bell now, all at once, she taken to wanting to go on the lake with her boat, and she insists our chauffore and her and me must go down and fix up the boat. We didn't none of us like it especial, but she said she hadn't been on the lake for so long she wanted to go once more before it got too cold.

I didn't know nothing about boats, but sometimes I'd go down to the boathouse and watch Bonnie Bell while she was tinkering with the engine or something. One day I went down to the boathouse about the middle of the afternoon, expecting to meet her out on the dock. All at once I hear voices out there, one of them hers. I stopped then, wondering who could of got on our dock.

There wasn't no way from the Wisners' yard to get on our dock now, because the door into their boathouse had been nailed up. The wall run clear down to their garridge, and their garridge faced onto the boathouse, which was lower down. The only way anybody could get on our dock from their place was to get in a boat and come round from the lake. Then it would of been easy.

I said I heard Bonnie Bell's voice. She was talking; who she was talking to, I didn't know.

"It's all wrong!" says she. "You are presuming too much. Of course I pulled you out of the lake — I would anybody; but your employers are not friends of ours. Even if they were you've no right in the world to speak to me."

Then I heard another voice. I knew it was Jimmie, their hired man. He spoke out and I heard him plain.

"I know I haven't," says he, "none in the world; but I've got to."

"You must not!" says she. "Go away!"

"I'll not," says he. "I can't help it! I tell you I can't help it."

Me being foreman, I reached around now to get hold of a brick or something. I couldn't help hearing what they said.

He'd been ordered off; yet here he was talking to Bonnie!

XV

THE COMMANDMENT THAT WAS BROKE

I STOOD close up to the boathouse door and was going to step out, but what the hired man was saying to Bonnie Bell was so nervy I had to stop. Besides, I wanted to hear what she'd say to show him his place.

"From the first minute I saw you," says he, "I couldn't help it. I swore then I'd meet you some day, and sometime ——"

"Is this the way?" I heard her say, low.

"It's the only way I have," says he. "If there was a better, don't you think I'd take it? But what chance did I have? I had to make some way; I wouldn't of been any sort of man if I hadn't."

She must just of stood looking at him. I couldn't see.

"I had to find some way to tell you," says he. "What part have I had in this foolish squabble? Was that my fault? I'm only a servant now; but give me a chance to break out of that. Why, when I was out West ——"

"Were you out West?" says she, sudden.

"Yes; in the Yellow Bull Valley, among the cowmen — among the real people. You came from that valley yourself."

"Yes, we did," says she; "and we'd far better of stayed there."

"You couldn't of stayed there," says he. "And besides, if you'd stayed there I'd never of met you, or you me."

"Indeed! Was that all my fortune — to meet the servant of my father's enemy?"

"It's all of mine! I'm not your enemy. But suppose now I went to your father and told him — what would he do?"

"He'd maybe kill you," says Bonnie Bell simply; "or else Curly would."

"I wouldn't blame either of them," says he. "I don't want to sneak around. I'm going away again ——"

"What made you come back?" she says.

"Because I was sick in my heart. Because I thought I could look over once in a while and see you. But when I came back, here was this cursed fence and I couldn't see you any more. I thought I'd go mad. Maybe I have; I don't know."

"With or without the fence," says Bonnie Bell, "how could our circles cross, yours and mine?"

"Circles!" says he. "Circles! What are circles?

I've heard this talk of circles all my life," says he. "I've seen it going on all around me. It's rot — rot! It's my misfortune to find one so far above me."

"My money?" says she, scornful. "I've a lot of it."

He didn't say a word to that for a long time.

"Did you really think that of me for a minute?" says he at last.

"You take it for granted that I've thought of you at all?" says she.

"I wouldn't of dared," says he — and it sounded like the truth, through the door. "Don't class me that way!"

"How can a girl tell?" says she. "Men talk like this to girls ——"

"Have they talked to you? Who was it?"

"My social opportunities," says she slow and bitter-like, "seem to be confined to our neighbors' gardener."

"Don't!" says he. "Oh, don't! I don't want to see you hurt, even by your own tongue."

I never'd heard any man hand out any talk of this sort to any girl before. It was right interesting and I was glad I listened.

"How can a girl tell?" says she, like she was talking to herself.

"Shorely she can't tell all at once," he answers.

"I'd never ask you to do more than wait. I'd want to go away and stay away till I could come in at your front door and be welcome," says he. "I wouldn't ask you to decide one thing now. But, as for me, I decided everything long ago."

She didn't say nothing.

"As to your money," says he after a while, "listen to me. Look at me — look close. Look into my eyes. Am I not honest? Tell me — if truth like mine can be mistaken for deceit, then what chance has any man on earth?"

She didn't answer, and he goes on like he had stepped up closer — I don't know but what he did.

"Look into my eyes," says he. "Look at me close. Maybe that'll help me some, for shorely you can see how much I ——"

"Don't!" says she. "Don't!"

I don't believe she looked into his eyes at all.

"I wouldn't touch you," says he. "I wouldn't touch your hand — I wouldn't touch the hem of your garment. It wouldn't be right. It maybe ain't right for me to think of meeting you again; but it's right this once."

She didn't answer at all. He come to what seemed to trouble him.

"Is it the money?" he says again. "What's money if you've got nothing else?"

"Not much," says she; "not very much."

"I've not coveted it," says he. "It's another commandment I've broke. I've coveted that which was my neighbor's. I've coveted you — no more, so much! If you and I had a shack on the Yellow Bull out there, and forty acres to start with," says he, "out where the sun shines all the time, and the wind is sweet, and the mountains rise up around you ——"

"Don't!" says she again. "Don't! Please go away — I can't stand that."

I couldn't stand it neither; so I opened the door.

XVI

HOW I WAS FOREMAN

THEY jumped apart — or farther apart — when I walked out. They wasn't holding hands, but she must of been looking at him and him at her.

"Miss Wright," says I, quiet — the first time I ever called her Miss Wright in all my life — "Miss Wright," says I, "come up to the house."

"Curly," says she, "oh, don't — don't!"

But she seen I didn't have no gun.

"Get across there quick!" says I to him.

"You overheard!" says he. "You overheard what I've been saying?"

"All of it," says I. "It was my business to. Of all the low-down things any man ever done in all his life, that's what you done now. I heard it all."

"Stop!" says he. "I won't stand that for a minute."

"You'll stand it for a lot longer than that," says I. "If you show this side the fence again I'll kill you!"

"Curly!" says he. "Why, Curly!" — like he was surprised. "Is it like that?"

"That's what it's like," says I. "Don't never doubt we can take care of our womenfolks. It's my own fault this has happened. I ought to of watched her closter. I ought never to of allowed you on our dock, let alone mixing with you. I thought you was more of a man than this," says I.

When I said that Bonnie Bell jumped and throwed her arms around my neck, and held on with both hands.

"Curly," says she, "stop! I'll not have this. Stop, I say!"

"You'll have this, and a lot more," says I to her, "till this thing is settled. Let me alone with him. Haven't your pa and me give up our lives for you? It's a fine trade you're trying to make; to trade us for a low-down coward like this. They built that fence, not us. Hell could freeze before your pa or me would ever cross it; but here you're talking the way you done with their hired man — that has sneaked around here to meet you."

He didn't give back none, though he couldn't talk at once.

"Go slow!" says he. "Curly, be careful! I didn't have any other chance."

"Any other chance?" says I. "For what? To make love to a girl that ain't had much experience — to make love to her because she's got a load of money?

I've seen some sort of dirt done in my life," says I, "but this is the lowest down I ever seen," says I.

"And Bonnie Bell," says I — she still had me around the neck, holding my arms down, and I didn't want to hurt her —"how'll I tell the old man? You know I've got to come through with him. You, the girl we loved so much, Bonnie Bell," says I, "we never thought you'd class yourself below your own level."

"She hasn't!" says he, right sudden then. "It wasn't her fault. She hasn't promised a thing to me, and you know that. She's not to blame for a thing, and you know that too. She hasn't said a word she couldn't say before all the world. What more do you want? She's too good a girl to get the worst of it. Her father's too good a man to get the worst of it too. She'd never let him."

"She won't have to do that," says I. "I'll take care of that. That's my business."

"Curly," says she, "what are you going to do? Don't you love my father at all — or me? You're like another father to me. And I've loved you; and I always will, whatever you do to me."

I couldn't put her arms down — I wasn't very strong, because I was thinking.

"If you tell my father," says she, "you'd break his heart. Cover it up for me, Curly — I've not promised anything. But, oh, Curly, I didn't mean harm to anyone; and I'll never be happy any more."

"You see what you've done!" says I to him after a while.

He got white now, instead of red.

"How can I make it up? I can't stand to hear her talk that way," he says.

"Whose business is it how she talks?" says I to him. "Damn you! What right have you to come here and make her unhappy for a minute? Didn't you know how we loved her?"

"Everyone does," says he. "Till I die I'll do that. How can I help it any more than you can? And if I've hurt her now," says he, "God do so to me and more also. But I've declared myself — I'll not take back a word. I didn't lie then and I won't now."

He seemed game. Still, so long as it's just talking, you can't always tell how much of a bluff a man is throwing.

"If it'll make her happy for me to go away and never come back," says he, "I'll do that. I don't want to play any game except on the square. Don't start anything that can't be ever mended," says he.

"It's started now," says I. "Maybe you can talk a girl down, but you can't us."

"What're you going to do, Bonnie Bell?" says I to her, and I taken her hands now in mine. "You've heard me and you've heard him. Which do you want, him or us — us that's loved you and give you everything we had, or him, this here coward, that come in the back way — our worst enemy's hired man? You got to choose."

I felt her slip loose from my neck then. She'd kept tight hold of me all the time, so I couldn't do anything. I looked down at her, and she was all loose and white. I reckon she fainted, though I never seen anyone do that before.

I laid her down on the boards, and I was so cold mad clean through now I couldn't of said a word. I've felt that way before. There ain't no law then. But he was white as she was.

"Curly," says he, "what have we done to the poor child?"

"She ain't your pore child," says I; and, with her in my arms and me helpless, I felt hot in my eyes. "She's our pore child. Shut up and gò home!"

He didn't go home, but went and got some water in his hat.

"It's cruel, cruel — it's all been cruel for her, who deserves the best that life could give. Can't you believe me, man?" says he.

She couldn't hear us now, and even the water I poured on her face didn't wake her up. I wouldn't let him touch her.

"Lord help us all!" says I. "For now it's a hard thing to say what's best. Tell me," says I, "was there anything I didn't hear? Did she make any sort of promise to you?"

"Not a word," says he—"not a word."

"That's lucky," says I. "The Circle Arrow never went back on its word. I'm glad she didn't promise you nothing," says I.

"There's nothing matters now," he says.

He set back on his heels, looking at me in a way I couldn't stand — with us both bending over her, trying to bring her to.

"I'm better than you think," says he, after a little while. "All this happened because things got criss-crossed."

"You queered the game the way you played it," says I to him. "The Circle Arrow plays wide open, with all the cards on the table. It beats hell how the luck runs in a square game sometimes! The front door is the place for a man that talks to a girl — like Katherine Kimberly comes in, or her brother, Tom."

"Does she know him?" says he, sudden.

"That's our business," says I. I still was pouring water on Bonnie Bell.

"Yes," says he, "that's true. He's not your enemy's servant."

About then Bonnie Bell begun to move her hands and I raised her up against my knees. She set there looking him in the face.

" Kid," says I, " you needn't rub your eyes and ast, 'Where am I?' I'll tell you. You're right in the middle of one hell of a muss!"

XVII

HIM AND THE FRONT DOOR

I SENT the kid up stairs to her room to think things over. Then I set down in our ranch room to think things over myself, because I didn't hardly know what to do.

While I was setting there in come Old Man Wright hisself from down town, and he was so happy I was shore he'd thought out some new devilment for his neighbor Wisner.

"Well, Curly," says he, "what do you know?"

"I don't know nothing that's pleasant," says I.

"Huh!" says he. "Don't you like the grub here no more, or what is it?"

"I don't like nothing about the place no more," says I. "I wish you'd foreclose on the Circle Arrow right away and us all go back there," says I. "Of course you wouldn't, but that's where you overlook a big bet, Colonel."

He looks at me serious.

"Is it as bad as that, Curly?" says he. "Sometimes I feel thataway myself, although along of me being so busy I can stand it better'n you maybe. But what kick have you got? You ain't got nothing to do — take it all around, I never seen a foreman that had less," says he.

"Huh!" says I. "That's all you know."

"Don't I know all there is to know?" he ast me.

"No, you don't," says I. "Don't I have to ride that line fence of ours and ain't it the worst one I ever traveled in all my life?"

"Don't let that bother you, son," says he. "I'll do the worrying about that."

Now when he said this I begun to think of all he'd done for me all my life; of how he'd paid all the bills, and taken the responsibility, and give me my wages. I didn't want to rake him up the shoulder now by telling him what I was just about going to tell him. I knowed if I told him that his girl had anyways gone against his will it'd nigh kill him — and as for this! But I argued I had to tell him. Then I thought that what a cowpuncher concludes deliberate is mighty apt to be the wrong thing. So where does that leave me? For the first time in my life I didn't know whether to back or copper my own bet.

The old man staved it off a little while, anyway. He goes over to the table and begins to fill his pipe.

"Well, Curly," says he, "I couldn't foreclose on the Circle Arrow if I wanted to now — they paid their deferred payment for this year. Old Wisner, he got backing from three banks and he come through. That leaves only one payment more. Somebody's going to be out in the cold before long; but it won't be us."

"No," says I; "it'll be them grangers."

"It ain't them that's going to get the worst of it — it's Old Man Wisner," says he. "As for us, we can't go back there no more — we're city folks now. I've got to stay here to watch Old Man Wisner a while and you've got to ride that fence.

"Where's Bonnie Bell?" says he then.

"Huh!" says I. "Where is she? That's what I'd like to know too."

"Come to that, after all," says he, smoking and looking into the fireplace, "the girl's got me guessing lately. She don't look well. Now she's up and now she's down — her actions don't track none. If I didn't know better I'd say she was in love. That couldn't be, for there ain't been no chance."

"Well," says I, "there's other kinds of deferred payments, ain't there, Colonel?"

"Maybe so," says he, sort of sighing. "We'll let it run as it lays; we can't help it much. Mostly a handsome girl finds somebody somewhere or somehow; or sometime ——"

"Ain't that the God's truth, Colonel!" says I.

I was just on the point of telling him all I knew.

"If only she was safe from the sharks!" says he.

"If I found any young man that I thought was after her money, not after her — why, I don't know what I'd do to him!"

"I know what you'd do, Colonel," says I; and I was glad I hadn't told him.

"Well, maybe. The trouble is to find any young man that's halfway as good as her, with some sort of folks back of him and some sort of way of making a living. You see, Curly, you can't tell much about things ten or twenty years ahead. A pore man may get money or a rich man may lose money. Now her ma married me when I didn't have no chance on earth ever to be anybody or to have any money; but we got on and was right happy — anyways I was — and I wasn't rich then.

"I'm awful rich now, Curly," says he, "though I don't know as I'm any happier. It bores me. For instance, I was looking around today for a chance to invest a little more money; not much, only about half of this here last deferred payment that come in — all Old Man Wisner's money — and I seen in the papers that we haven't got no potash works in America to amount to much, and that potash is shore worth plenty of money — whatever potash is. So I went out to look over things and I concluded to invest a few hundred thousand dollars in making potash. I've got a good man, with specs, that knows how to make it out of seaweed, or something that grows raw and is plenty, I reckon. I suppose pretty soon we'll be making forty to fifty per cent; maybe more. That's what bothers me — I can't find no hard game to play. I can't hardly take no interest in life.

"I was looking around some more and I seen where this country ain't got no dye works — the kind of dyes they make outen coal tar, which is made outen coal. Yet we've got plenty of coal and I own several coal mines out in Wyoming. I got another man, with specs, and I shouldn't wonder if we'd be making plenty of dyes before long, same as they used to import.

"Well," says he, filling up his pipe again, "I'd be happy enough fooling around this way, pushing in a few white checks once in a while — a few hundred thousand dollars. Anyways, I'd like it if I could lose once in a while — but then there's the kid."

"It comes around to her after all, Colonel, don't it?" says I.

"That's right," he says. "I play the game; she uses the winnings. She's going to be one of the richest girls in this whole town."

Seems like I couldn't get to tell him what I ought to. Every time he came around to the same place, talking about the kid. He didn't know as much as I did. I knew what'd make Old Man Wisner the happiest man alive — he'd feel that way if he knowed his hired man had got thick with our girl! He'd of encouraged that any way he could if he'd knowed anything about it. That would of pleased him. I had in my mind, too, how Bonnie Bell had looked at that hired man. So I set there, not having said a word yet and not daring to. It just seemed like I couldn't tell the old man.

It was getting towards night now before long and I hadn't made no break at all. I set and set, and didn't have no nerve. By and by it was too late to say anything that night.

We heard Bonnie Bell coming down the staircase, and we went to the door to meet her, like we did usual, because we liked to do that; she was so pretty when she was ready for dinner. The servants didn't look up to her pa and me very much, but they'd jump through hoops all the time for her.

She was dressed all up now in a pale blue dress, some sort of soft silk, and she had on all her diamonds, for she was shining all over. Her hair was high up and it had a little band on it, and a little pile of it stuck up behind on her head. Her neck was cut low, like they wore 'em at the hotel where we lived once, and her dress didn't have no sleeves in it. She had rings on her fingers, though not no bells on her toes — only little blue slippers; and her socks was pale blue, like we could see when she come down the stairs.

I don't expect there was any handsomer woman in the world than she was then — they don't make 'em any handsomer. We stood looking at her, us two cowmen, both in clothes that was always getting mussed up, and with tobacco in the pockets. We couldn't say a word. We got scared of her, I said; you would, often, when you looked at Bonnie Bell, she was so pretty. Yet she didn't know she had such looks.

"Daughter," says Old Man Wright, and he went up to her slow, like he was afraid of her, "you're very beautiful tonight," says he. "What makes you pale? You're a mighty fine girl. Dast you kiss your old pa before he goes in and gets into togs fit to eat with you?"

She looks at me and then at him, and she knows I haven't said nothing about that talk with the hired man. She was pale and didn't smile. She went up to her pa like she was tired — she didn't have much color that night in her face — and she just puts up her arms around her pa's neck and laid her head down on his shoulder, and didn't say a word. She didn't cry; she just let her head lay there.

I seen his arm go around on her bare shoulders easy-like — he didn't hardly touch her for fear she'd break; and he didn't say a word. He was that sort of man that almost any sort of woman would like to put her arms around his neck and lay her head on him if she was in trouble.

"What is it, Honey?" says he at last.

"Why, nothing, dad," says she. "I love you — that's all. You believe it, don't you?"

"Will you always, sis?" says he, sort of funny.

"Always," says she, quiet. "Now," says she, "run off and get dressed up. Have you forgotten that the Kimberlys are coming for dinner tonight with us? Curly, you must go get on some dark clothes, you know."

You see, I was one of the family. I maybe gave them plenty of trouble, but they never'd let me eat anywheres but with them all the time. By this time I'd learned quite a few things from Bonnie Bell — about how not to put a napkin up too high, or to break my bread up into little pieces and pile them up, or to pour out my coffee, or to use the same spoon for coffee and other vittles, or to sidle up my plate for the last drop of soup there was in it — oh, several tricks like that; though I knew the game was a heap complicated and I hadn't learned it all yet.

She looks at me when I went out the door and I shook my head to show I hadn't said nothing. She set down, all in her silk and her shining rings and things, right on our old hide lounge; and she was looking at our painting of the Yellow Bull Valley and the old ranch house. I left her there, all in her diamonds, her hair tied up high — about the richest girl in Chicago and, like enough, the miserablest right then. But she didn't have nothing on me at that.

When we come back, all fixed up the best we could, she was still setting there. She was pretty — Lord, how pretty! — but sad.

She gets up now and begins to laugh and talk right fast to the old man, and by and by, before anything broke, Old Man Kimberly and Old Lady Kimberly drifted in.

"The young folks'll be over before long," says he; "we didn't wait for 'em, because I just wanted a taste of the old bourbon that I find here and can't find anywheres else. Where did you get it, Colonel?" says he.

Most everybody called him Colonel now, from me doing it first, and then Katherine.

"We had a few barrels out on the old ranch," says the boss. "A little of it escaped in the massacree. I'm glad you like it."

It come now about time for dinner, which was always pulled off on the tick of the clock. On the ranch in camp the cook always calls "Grub pile!" for the hands. In the home ranch he's more particular, and he says, "Come and git it!" when dinner's ready. But here, in our new house, our butler, William, always'd gumshoe in and say it so low you couldn't hardly hear him: "Dinner is served, Miss Wright." But, as them kids was a little late in coming, Old Man Kimberly finds time to take another nip.

"Why, Wilfred!" says his wife to him, "I'm surprised!"

"It's funny how you're surprised," says he, chuckling in his shirt front; "but I'm glad to have you keep up my reputation by saying you're surprised."

Somehow it was with them like it is with plenty of folks in the States — the women always seem finer, more delercate than the men; yet they seem to like men that ain't fussy. Old Man Kimberly was a good sort; but to look at her you'd wonder why she married him. She always set up straight, away from a chair or a sofa back, and she had a face that was clean-cut, like one of them cameo faces on cuff buttons. Katherine was some like her pa, and a good sort too.

"How sweet you look tonight!" says Old Lady Kimberly to Bonnie Bell after a time.

She always seemed to want to reach out and touch Bonnie Bell, or kiss her once in a while — they natural liked each other — Bonnie Bell especial, from never having no ma of her own, very much.

But after a time our William come to the door and stood there like he was a pointer dog and had found some birds; and says he, with a stop between, like he always did:

"Miss Kimberly — ahum! Mr. Thomas Kimberly — ahum!"

XVIII

HOW TOM STACKED UP

I RECKON if Katherine's brother, Tom Kimberly, had of knowed how much we was waiting for a look at him he might of been some fussed up about it; but when our William brought him and Katherine in he didn't seem rattled.

He was a right tallish young fellow, maybe twenty-four years or thereabouts, slim, and with a wide mouth. He had a good deal of brown hair, which he combed back from his forehead, without no part in it. He was dressed up like city folks do for dinner, and his necktie wasn't tied careless, but right careful. He looked a good deal like a picture in a tailor shop. His hands didn't even seem to bother him like mine do me sometimes — I often wisht a man could have forty pockets to put all his hands into.

When he seen Bonnie Bell he lit up. Katherine hurried him over and put her hand on Bonnie Bell's arm.

"Honey," says she to Bonnie Bell, "I've brought over my brother Tom; and I want you to like him and I want him to like you."

"That's going to be the easiest thing you know," says he smiling.

He had right good teeth. Bonnie Bell she give him her hand, her arm straight out in front of her, and I didn't think she shook hands very hard; but he did. He kept on looking at her like he was fascernated. It was plain to see that the kid had him on the ropes in the first round.

We went on to the big dining-room right soon. This was the first time the Kimberlys had ever et at our house, except cookies and tea and things in the parlor or in the ranch room. When Mrs. Kimberly come into our big dining-room she taken one look up and down. Maybe she'd been thinking it was like the ranch room all the way through. That showed how little she knew about Bonnie Bell.

They was arranged in pairs as long as the women lasted — this Tom and Bonnie Bell, of course, together; and Mrs. Kimberly and Old Man Wright; and then Katherine and me and Old Man Kimberly. William helped Old Lady Kimberly and Bonnie Bell set down, like they had rheumatism, and I done what I could for Katherine, her and me being pretty good pals. Old Man Kimberly found his cocktail without no help. Right soon he set down to have a pleasant time, him.

We had a good dining-room — large, with white trimmings — and some carpets that cost as much as two thousand dollars each, and chairs that matched the table, and plenty of pictures.

I been around now a lot among our best people and I notice that unless you've got some pictures of sheep in your house you're no good. Any artist just natural has to paint sheep; yet that's the meanest anermal there is, and I don't see why a cowman especial should have sheep in his house. But we done so because it was correct — though I've never et sheep meat. Also, a couple of gondolas, by some Italian, near the sheep.

Besides them, if you've got a good house you've got to have one picture about twilight on a lake, with a broken tree on it and some weeds, and a crane standing there like it didn't have no friends. We had one of them crane pictures too.

When Old Lady Kimberly seen we had sheep and gondolas and weeds and cranes in our house, same as anybody else, she seemed to feel more comfortable. I told Katherine some of those things I'd found out about art and she come near choking in her soup, and said I was awful funny, though I was serious.

"Everything you've got," says she, "is perfectly lovely."

"She done it," says I, which was true. The old man and me, if we was left alone, would never of had even a picture of sheep in the whole house.

Like enough you've been at dinners in cities where they don't have everything on the table in big dishes, like at a ranch, but a little at a time; so you've got to guess frequent whether you're going to get enough to eat out of things that's coming on later. We was pretty well trained, Old Man Wright and me, since we come to our new house, for Bonnie Bell and William and all the rest run a regular city system on us.

Bonnie Bell was easy as Mrs. Kimberly would of been at her house. She didn't have to say a word to William; he shore was some butler — I reckon he buttled as good as anyone in the Row. I reckon he was born a orphan, he looked so sad.

We had some soup made out of turtle, which is better'n you'd think, to look at a turtle. Afterward was fish I couldn't name. Then there was ducks and potatoes, cooked together so you couldn't tell 'em apart, and considerable other birds with things put on; and alfalfa, with kerosene on it, maybe. After a while comes soft cheese, with strawberries, and yet softer cheese, with little onions cut in it, if you liked that better — I can't remember all them things now or how they come, but we was a couple of hours there and got considerable to eat before we quit. Also, Old Man Kimberly got plenty to drink. He says to the boss:

"You'll excuse me, Colonel," says he, "but I can't help saying a word in favor of your choice in wines."

And then —"Wilfred!" says his wife, as though it wasn't polite to say you liked things.

Since Katherine was talking to me all the time, and since Tom couldn't see nothing but Bonnie Bell, I reckon the whole party was pretty well suited.

After dinner, while we was setting in the ranch room — which they all liked so well —and could have sherry or coffee, or both, or maybe Scotch, Mrs. Kimberly kept on saying to the old man:

"Wilfred, I'm surprised!"

"So'm I, my dear," says he —"surprised that we've never been here all the time before. You may mark us down as steadies now," says he.

We had in the middle of the house, offen the ranch room, a long room, with a piano in it, and a smooth floor, and rugs that could be easy pushed away. Nothing'd do for them folks but they must go to dancing now. Sometimes Katherine played the piano and sometimes Bonnie Bell; she shore could slug a piano plenty when she wanted. She didn't get to play much, because Tom he wanted to dance with her all the time —turkeys' trots, I think they called it, or fox hops, or something of the kind.

Seems like she could do that, too, for she had lessons downtown. When Katherine got Old Man

Wright to dance with her there wasn't no one left to play; so we set a music box going, and Katherine made me play on a jew's-harp too.

Tom Kimberly certainly was up in all the late steps of dancing; that was one thing he could do. While him and Bonnie Bell was dancing I could see all the old folks looking at them quietlike. It was plain that he was mighty hard hit with Bonnie Bell. Old Man Wright he'd look at him once in a while — right close too. As for Bonnie Bell, she was pleasant, like she always was; but it didn't seem to me she laughed as much as usual. We was all of us showing off our goods.

When they come to go away, Katherine she hugged Bonnie Bell tighter than ever, and Old Man Kimberly held her hand for quite a while.

"You'll take pity on a old man, won't you," says he, "and come to see us often? You really must."

"Yes, my dear," says Mrs. Kimberly; "come and liven us up sometimes. It's been very delightful to see you young people enjoy yourselves so much — and you old people too," says she, and laughed at her husband, who maybe was some illuminated.

It was plain enough to me when they went away that our place had turned out better'n they thought it would. Bonnie Bell, too, if she'd been on inspection for them, same as Tom Kimberly was with us, certainly'd more than made good. Likewise, I suppose our sheep and gondola pictures must of made good too. We couldn't exactly of been classed as heathen — not unless me and Old Man Wright was.

We didn't say nothing to Bonnie Bell about these things, and pretty soon she kissed her pa good night and went upstairs to her room. The old man and me set for a while thinking things over.

"What do you think of him, Curly?" says he to me after a while.

"Well," says I, "it ain't just as though the cat had brought him in. He's good-looking," says I, "and he can dance; and he's a pleasant fellow enough. I only sort of got it in for people that drink cocktails instead of straight liquor and push their hair back thataway."

"Well now," he went on, "you've got to allow for differences in different places. Riding and roping ain't so important in Chicago as dining and dancing — not among our best people," says he. "You've got to take account of that. A girl might do a lot worse."

"There ain't nobody good enough for Bonnie Bell," says I, "when it comes to that; but I was just sort of thinking I like a man to know something about riding and shooting, and that sort of thing, as well as dancing."

"Curly," says he, "you said your pa was a hardshell?"

"Yes," says I.

"A hard-shell Presbyterian?" says he. "Anyhow, your folks must of been right exacting. Now don't be too hard on young folks."

"Listen to me, Colonel," says I. "Suppose you had two of 'em right here — one that didn't have no family nor no money, but took to ranch work sort of natural; and one that could dance and dine like you say. One of these men parts his hair on one side and one combs it back, without no part. Which one of 'em would you like most?"

"I'd have to see both men and size 'em up," says he. "But what makes you ask? The other kind of young man you're talking about ain't showed up yet. Besides, one thing that favors Tom is he don't have to marry for money. Bless you; he ain't thinking of her money — not one dollar; just thinking of her, right the way she is. He's gone — that's what he is."

"That's so," says I; "that's certainly so. But how about her?"

"They all take their chances," says Old Man Wright, solemn, after a while. "Anyway you can fix it a woman takes a chance. She's in a gamble all her whole born life. She's a gamble herself and she has to play in a gamble from the time she begins to toddle till the time they fold her hands. She can't tell if her husband's going to stick; she can't tell if her husband's going to make good; she can't tell how her kids is going to turn out — that's all a gamble too.

"Do your best, Curly, and try your damnedest, there ain't no way you can protect no woman against them gambles. If I wait for exactly the right man to come along, that don't comb his hair back, how do I know he'll ever come? If he does come maybe he'll have a eye on her bank roll, or maybe he'll measure forty inches around his pants. Either one — ary one — it's all a gamble for a girl.

"No," he went on; "about the only thing she can do, after all, is to use her own head and her own heart. It ain't in the nature of things that you can look ahead and see how the game's coming out for any girl — she has to take her chances. We've got to stand by and see her do it. I wisht it wasn't so. I loved her ma so much, and she looks so much like her ma — why, I wisht — why, I wisht —— Damn it, don't I wisht it wasn't such a dash-blamed, all-fired, hell-for-certain gamble for the kid!"

It wasn't no time for me to say anything about any hired man now! By and by the old man quit looking into the fire and got up and went off to bed.

XIX

THEM AND BONNIE BELL

IT was a right fine place for me — probably not. Here I was, foreman under full pay, and bound to play on the level with the boss, to say nothing of the long time I'd worked for him. Of course I ought to tell him all about that Wisners' hired man; but how could I?

It come to a question whether I liked the boss best or Bonnie Bell, which is no fair place to put a man. Any man is apt to want to favor the woman in a case like that. Come to get down to cases, I found I liked Bonnie Bell a lot more than I ever'd realized I did. I was part her dad, you know, and I couldn't stand to see her unhappy.

The trouble with a cowpuncher, like I said, is that he hasn't got no real brains. I never used to notice that before, because it don't need no brains to be a puncher, as long as you stick to the ranch. But here I needed 'em right keen now.

Every day I walked the line fence; but there wasn't no work about that, for the bricks was mostly stuck back in the hole, and the hired man that had made all the trouble he kept on his own side — I didn't never see him no more at all.

Bonnie Bell didn't say a word to me, nor me to her. I thought she ought to come to me and talk things over; but she didn't. I knowed she hadn't said a word to her pa, and I knowed I hadn't neither.

Tom he called three times the first week. I didn't care much for him someways, though I knowed I ought. Bonnie Bell knowed she ought too. Her pa knowed he ought too. If ever a fellow played in a game like that, with all the ways greased for him, Tom was him.

Old Man Wright he turns to me one evening when we was setting by the fire in our room, and he says to me:

"Well, Curly, how are you enjoying yourself now in this hard and downtrod position that life has gave to you?"

"I don't like it none, Colonel," says I; "not none at all, nohow."

"Why don't you join a cowpunchers' union, then?" he ast. "Pshaw! This is a good town and I rather like it. The game here is easy to beat — easier than it was in Wyoming. For instance, just the other day I bought a bunch of timber land out in Arizony — a place where I've never been nor want to go, because they've got the tick fever down there scandalous, and irrigation, which is a crime. Well, I only bought in on this timber because a friend of mine wanted me to come in with him; and, figuring I didn't know nothing about it, I allowed I certainly would lose for once — I couldn't tell a pine tree from a spruce to save my life."

"Huh!" says I. "I suppose then somebody comes along and offers you twice your money for it, maybe?"

"No; they didn't," says he. "I was hoping they would; but they didn't. No, it was old Uncle Sam come along through that part of the state, and he sees where we've got about all the best timber left on top of a range of mountains in there, and he allows he ought to keep that timber from ever being cut; so he buys it off us for four times what we give for it — not twice. Uncle Sam pays in real money."

"Huh!" says I. "I never did have no trouble like you have, Colonel, to find a game where I could lose money. I suppose maybe you made seegar money out of that too?"

"A little, maybe. I only put in a little in the first place — two, three hundred thousand dollars; not much. I was so in hopes I could lose some money so as to sort of encourage me like, you know. But it's no use, Curly!" And he sighs right heavy.

"You have my symperthy, Colonel," says I. "If ever you want any help, so as to make the game more interesting, just let me set in and take your hand for you — I'll guarantee on my record that I'll open your eyes in ways how to lose money."

"All right, Curly," says he. "I'll ast you sometime and maybe copper your bets. I always do that when my lawyer or my stockbroker gives me any tips. It's the surest way in the world to make a killing in this here, now, stock market.

"For instance, just the other day they told me down there to be shore and buy a lot of Blue Mountain Steel, which certainly was backed by the J. P. Morgan interests and was going to get a lot of war orders. So I didn't — I bought Steel Boat Electric Common instead of that. I didn't know anything about it, but somebody must of give them some war orders, submarines of something. I notice our stock has rose around two hundred per cent the last few weeks. I don't know why it is that things of been going on this way," says he. "It bothers me a lot, Curly. Yet I only put a few hundred thousand in that too.

"I'm setting aside two-thirds of all I make in this here city in the kid's name, Curly," says he. "It's a five per cent trust for keeps. It's getting to be something awful how much that fund of hers is! And, the best I can do, I can't help its increasing right along. There don't seem to be no way in which we can get broke and go back to honest work again, such as raising cows — though making four calves grow where there wasn't none in the sage brush before, that's really being useful in the world, war or no war."

He set there for some time looking in the fire, serious, and he come around again to the same old place.

"Curly," says he, "if there is any created critter on this human footstool that I hate and despise, and that every he-man in the world hates and despises, it's the man that'll marry a girl for her money. Look at them dukes and things that come over here and marry our American girls. I never shot a duke, but I will if one of 'em blows in here and starts anything like that with our girl."

"Maybe he won't come," says I. "You never can tell."

"Curly," says he, "you can always tell! Listen to me. There's just one thing certain in the whole world — or two. If a girl's handsome men'll come around. If she's rich men'll come around. They fall out of the sky. They come up out of the ground. They break in through the fence ——"

"What's that?" says I. "Colonel, what do you mean about fences?"

"I mean to say that there ain't no fence on earth you could build that'd keep out young men from a handsome girl that's got money."

"Ain't that the God's truth, Colonel!" says I. "How come you to figure that out?"

"How? How come me to break through the fence that was built around Bonnie Bell's ma, back in Maryland, and carry her away from there? But when I think that, like enough, some low-down cuss like me'll come around and break through my fence and carry off my girl, to take such chances as her ma done—I tell you it makes the sweat come right out on me."

"Well, Colonel," says I, "I reckon if any young man comes along here, no matter if he gets in at the front door or crawls in under the fence, he's got to show some revenue as well as be all right other ways?"

He set some time thinking before he answered.

"That's a right hard question, Curly," says he. "I wouldn't bar a poor man if I was shore he was on the square. It wouldn't be so hard to decide if she didn't have any money; but she has, and it can't be concealed much longer."

He gets up and walks up and down a while talking.

"I declare, if I was a young man I'd never ast no rich young woman to marry me at all. I'd be afraid to ast her, for fear she'd spot me or accuse me, whichever way it was. I can't agree to no pore young man for her, for I couldn't trust him. And I can't agree to no rich young man for her, because none of 'em ain't worth a damm, as far as I've seen."

"It looks like a awful thing, Colonel, to have a cheeild that's rich and lovely."

"Yes," says he; "and it ain't no joke neither."

"Well now, Colonel," says I, "take the houses in this Row where we live. How many young men is there that we can tally out?"

He shook his head.

"There ain't none at all worth mentioning — believe me!" says he.

I did believe him. That left just Tom for the entry in the Bonnie Bell Stakes. Looked like he couldn't lose.

XX

WHAT OUR WILLIAM DONE

NOBODY said a word to Bonnie Bell about Tom Kimberly — neither her pa nor me; for she was so quiet and shut up like we couldn't seem to break in noways. We had to let it go like it laid on the board. One thing shore, being in love or not being — whichever it was — had changed Bonnie Bell a heap. She wasn't the same girl no more.

It used to be that Bonnie Bell didn't care so much for her piano as for things out of doors, but now she taken to soaking that pore helpless thing — sometimes sad and lonesome, and then again so hard she'd near bust the keys. Then, maybe after she'd pasted the stuffing out of it a few times, she'd set looking out of the window with her hands in her lap — and so forgetful of her hands that they lay there, little as they was, on their backs, with the fingers turned up on the ends, and even her thumbs. It made me sorry.

Then again she'd cut off the music for days and go to reading books, mostly in the window seat, her head puckered, like it was hard work.

"What're you reading, Hon?" says I one day.

"Seems to me it must be a bad-luck story. Also, why have you took to reading books upside down?"

"Nonsense!" says she. "I been brushing up in my sikeology," says she. "That was one of our senior studies — the last year I had in Smith's, you know."

"What's it for?" says I. "Does it say anything about whether it's going to rain next Tuesday?" I ast her.

"Well, it's something needed to train us to meet the problems of life as they arrive, Curly," says she.

"Does it show you how to look any young fellow in the face," says I — "one that's got his hair combed back and no part in it, and playing La Paloma on a banjo or a guitar, and guess what he's thinking about, Bonnie?" says I.

She got a little red and tapped her foot on the carpet.

"What do you mean, Curly?" says she.

"Nothing," says I. "Only I was wondering if they'd put me in a long coat at the wedding. I never was backed into one of 'em in my whole life."

"Well, Curly," says she, "if you wait for my wedding you may need the long coat for your funeral first."

"Huh!" says I. "Huh! Is that so? You don't know your pa none," says I.

"What do you mean, Curly?" says she, sharp.

"He ain't going to be boarding you all your life, kid," says I. "He can't noways afford it."

"I reckon dad isn't worried much," says she.

"Are you so shore, kid?" says I to her. "Now look here: I'm, say, half your pa. I haven't said a word to you about certain things. What's more, I haven't said a word to your pa about them neither."

"I know it, Curly," says she, looking at me sudden. "I love you for it. You're one grand man, Curly!"

"I'm one worried man," says I. "I've gone back on my job with your pa."

"Do you feel that way, Curly?" says she, and she looked scared. "And is that my fault?"

"I shore do and it shore is," says I.

"But you haven't said a word."

"No — not yet."

"Don't, Curly!" says she, right quick. "Don't — oh, please don't!"

She puts her hand on my arm then and looks into my eyes.

She had me buffaloed right there. I couldn't get her hand off'n my arm. I couldn't help patting it when it laid there.

"Aw, shucks!" says I to her. "Come now!"

Right then our William he come in at the door, and stood there and coughed like he done when he had anything on his mind.

"Ahum!" says he, sad like.

"What is it, William?" says Bonnie Bell, looking round at him.

"Beg pardon, ma'am, but might Hi speak with Mr. Wilson for a moment?"

You see, he called me Mr. Wilson, that being my last name. It was in the Bible, or else I probably would of forgot it.

"Oh, all right," says I; and I got up and went out with him.

He was standing in his little hall when I come out, and he has our Boston dog, Peanut, tied to a chair leg there with a piece of rope. Peanut barked joyful at me, thinking I was going to take him outdoors maybe.

"Hexcuse me, sir," says William, right sad, "but this little dog is a hobject of my suspicion, sir."

"What's that?" says I. "What do you suspect him of — embeazlement, maybe?"

William he stoops down then and unties something that Peanut has fastened in his collar. It was a envelope. It didn't have no name on it.

"This is the third one Hi found on 'im," says William. "Hi 'ave the other two in my desk. Hi don't know, sir, for whom they may be hintended, sir."

"Well, who sent 'em? Is anybody going to blow up our place unlessen we put twelve thousand dollars under a stone on the front sidewalk?"

"That's what Hi wish to hinquire, sir. Hi became alarmed," says William. "Hi thought Hi'd awsk you about it, sir, Mr. Wright not being at 'ome."

"Why didn't you awsk Miss Wright?" says I.

"Hi didn't wish to alarm her, possibly."

We stood there, with this letter in our hands, looking it over.

"You say you don't know where this dog's been?" says I.

"Oh, no, sir; quite the contrary. I don't doubt he's often been through the — ahum! — ahum! ——"

"Well, how often has he been through the ahum, William?" says I. "What made you let him go? You know it's against orders."

"Hi am quite hinnocent of hany hinfraction of my duties," says he. "On the contrary, Hi've watched this Peanut dog most closely, sir. Yet at times 'e is habsent. Hi'm of the belief that the notes come from the hother side of the fence, sir. But has to their haddress, and has to their contents, sir, Hi assure you Hi'm hutterly hignorant; and hit was for that reason that Hi awsked you to come and see this one. Hit's just at 'and, sir."

I taken all three of them letters away from him and opened them, me being foreman; but when I begun to read I didn't tell William what they was. I only laughed out loud, hard as I could.

"This is just a joke, William," says I. "Don't pay no attention to it. You see, Peanut's been over there again, digging up some petunies," says I.

I went back into the room where Bonnie Bell was. I looked at her for a while.

"Miss Wright," says I — the second time I ever called her that — "I've played the game with you on the square, haven't I? You thanked me for that."

"Yes, Curly; yes," says she. "Why?"

"Have you played in on the square with me?"

"Yes, Curly, I have."

"I told you not to have nothing more to do across the fence, didn't I?"

"Yes. I haven't."

"Is that so, Bonnie Bell Wright?" says I. "Then what's this?"

I put in her hand the note — the one I'd read. It was my business to do that, the way it come to me.

"Read it," says I to her.

Near as I can remember, it run about like this:

Why don't you come again? When shall I see you? I'm in the same place every day and I wait and wait. Please! Please! Please!

It wasn't signed with no name — only just "The Man Next Door."

Bonnie Bell went pale as a sheet when she read that.

"Curly," says she, "I never saw it before."

I believed her. She'd of died rather'n lie straight out to me. Maybe she'd lie some — almost any woman would — but not straight out from the shoulder between the eyes. So I believed her now.

"Read the next one," says I.

"Have you read my letters, Curly?" says she. She looked at me savage now.

"I read one of 'em," says I, "and part of the next one. I didn't only read the first page on that one. I didn't read the other one at all. But I read enough."

On the first page of this second letter was something more:

I've waited and waited [it said]. I ought never to have met you as I did — I ought never to have said what I did. I am in the deepest distress over all this, for I would not be guilty of an act to cause you pain. How could I when I ——

Right there's where the first page ended and the second page begun.

"Did you read it all, Curly?" says she to me once more.

"No; only the first page," I says. "This last one we just took off'n Peanut's collar. He brought 'em over."

She was reading the last letter now — the one I never did see. Her face got soft somehow. Her eyes got bigger and brighter, and softer, somehow, too.

She folded the letters all up and put 'em in her lap and looked up at me.

"You didn't read all my letters, Curly?" says she.

"No," says I; "and I won't never read no more. There mustn't be no more, Bonnie Bell. You know that."

"Yes," says she; "I know that."

But somehow she didn't seem unhappy like she ought to of been. I could see that.

"How did Peanut get through the fence, Curly?" says she at last.

"There's a hole in the lower corner near the garridge. I thought it was kept shut. Their hired man dug it through. He said it was to let Peanut through to enjoy hisself digging up their petunies," says I, "or to have a sociable fight with their dog. I reckon that's how Peanut got through. It was easy enough to fasten things on his neck. Whether it was a square thing to do, him knowing what he does — well, that's something you ought to know."

She didn't say anything at that.

"A honorable man," says I, "would of come around to the front door, Bonnie Bell."

"He had no part in this quarrel," says Bonnie Bell at last, quiet like. "Why blame him?"

That made me hot.

"Why blame him?" I broke out. "Didn't I see him? Ain't I heard him? Can't I see now? He ain't no part of a man at all or he wouldn't of done this way. Now," says I, "I've shore got to tell the old man. I hoped I wouldn't ever have to. But now I got to. The safest bet you ever made is that hell will pop!"

She turned around right quick then and jumped up on her feet, and her face was so white it scared me. She come up again and put her arms right around my neck and looked at me.

"Honey," says I, "you got us in wrong — awful wrong! Now us men has got to square it the best we can."

"Stop, Curly!" says she, and she shook me by the shoulder. "Stop! He's — he's a good man. He's — he's honest. He's meant all right. Give him a chance."

"He don't deserve no chance," says I, "and he won't get none."

"It was the best he could do! He had no chance to come here openly — not a chance in the world. Maybe he only wanted to say good-by — oh, how do you know?"

"Did he say good-by or good morning in that last letter, Bonnie Bell?" I ast her. "Not that it makes much difference either way."

"I won't tell you what he said, Curly," she flared up at me now. "I only say he did the best he could. He asked for his chance — that's all."

"His chance! The hired man of the worst enemy we got! His chance! His chance! What chance has he give you? How fair is he playing the game where all your happiness is up? Oh, Bonnie, shore you don't care for him?" says I. "Now do you?"

She didn't say a word and I turned toward the door.

"Where you going, Curly?" says she, coming after me.

"I'm going downtown," I says to her.

"Why?"

"To see your pa," says I. "I got to tell him all about this, and do it now."

She made a quick run at me then, and her arms come around my neck again.

"Oh, Curly! Curly!" she says; and she was crying now. "Oh, what have I done? It'll kill dad if anything of this gets out — I couldn't stand it. I can't stand to think of it, Curly. I can't! I can't!"

"Why can't you, Bonnie?" says I.

"Because, Curly"— she got me by the arms again and she was crying hard —"because —— I'll have to tell you — I'll have to, Curly. I can't help it! I didn't want it to happen — I fought it to keep it from happening as long as I could — I didn't want it to be this way. It was hard — so awfully hard. I tried every way I could; but I can't — I can't *help* it, Curly! I can't! I can't! It's no use!" She just run on, over and over.

"What is it, Bonnie?" says I, "Do you love him?"

"Yes, yes; it's true! I do, Curly — I love him!"

XXI

HER PA'S WAY OF THINKING

"NEAR as I can figure, Curly," says Old Man Wright to me soon after what had happened between me and Bonnie Bell — "near as I can figure, Old Man Wisner's been advertising that the old Circle Arrow Range is a great little place for the honest granger to raise bananas, pineapples and other tropical fruits."

"It ain't," says I, "except tomatoes — and them in tin cans."

"The honest yeoman," says he, "according to Old Man Wisner's description, he don't never have to eat anything as common as bread and butter, not after he's bought some of that land at four hundred and fifty dollars a acre. He lives after that time on bird tongues and omelet souflay, and all he has to do is to set on his wide veranda and watch his lowing herds increase and multiply at eighty-five dollars a head — and prices going up all the time. Ain't that fine, Curly? Things never used to happen just thataway when you and me owned that range, did they?"

"Not hardly," says I.

"No," says the old man, falling into one of them thinking spells. "No; they didn't."

Then after about half a hour he says:

"Nor they can't, neither. It'll cost that old miser, Dave Wisner, about three or four million dollars," says he. "He's put up his life, his fortune and his sacred honor on that irrigation scheme, and he's going to be lucky if he gets through with any of them before I call it off."

"Colonel," says I, "you and him remind me of two old Galloways out on the range, standing head to head, and pushing for a couple of hours or so at a time — only, you two been pushing for a couple of years."

"Uh-huh!" says he. "But I'm right cheerful; and I don't feel my neck giving none yet," says he; and he rubs his hand up and down it.

"Has Tom Kimberly been here lately?" the old man ast me, real suddenlike, right soon after that, though I hadn't said nothing to him.

"He was here this afternoon," says I. "He ast after Miss Bonnie. She says she was sick, had a cold, and couldn't see no one."

"I'll give Tom sixty days for to propose to Bonnie Bell," says he. "If he don't, then I'll have to. It don't stand to reason that girl's going to have a bad cold that's going to last for sixty days; so she'll be home sometimes when he comes over. I know how his ma and pa feel about it, and I know how I feel too. Maybe we can get Tom to part his hair after a while, or take up some manly habit like chawing tobacco instead of touching the light guitar. Just to take a look at him, I'd say he shaved with one of them little razors like a hoe. For all I know, he may wear garters. Still, time alters many things.

"He's marrying into crowned heads when he comes into our family," says he, going on, "because I'm alderman here, and if my freckles lasts I'm liable to keep on being alderman. Sometimes I wisht I'd put in the papers that I was clean broke and depended on the savings which a faithful old servitor — that's you, Curly — had brung me in my time of need. But I'm afraid it's too late for that now, though the time to test them things is before the wedding obsequies and not after."

"Colonel," says I, "suppose a young man would of come along that didn't have no family back of him, nor no money, but parted his hair, and shaved with a real razor, and wore no garters, and et tobacco, and was right husky looking — what would you think?"

"I'd think the millennium had came, here in Chicago," says Old Man Wright. "I won't deny, Curly, if I had found a young man that could ride setting down, and chawed tobacco, I wouldn't needed to of thought about him twice — always provided he played a wide-open game and acted like he knew what he wanted."

"We don't seem to get together none," says I, despondent.

"Get together!" says he. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," says I.

XXII

ME AND THEIR LINE FENCE

I HAD to own it up to myself — I'd lost my nerve. I tried more'n fifteen times to come out and tell Old Man Wright about them Peanut letters from their hired man to Bonnie Bell, and I couldn't — I would see her face every time come in between him and me.

I kept my eyes on that hole in the fence. I was setting there fixing up the bricks, ready to put them in, when I heard some one talking on the other side of the fence. You couldn't see nobody through the fence, no more'n if they was a thousand miles away; but you could hear 'em talk, all right, there, through the hole. I could tell who one of 'em was — it was the voice of Old Lady Wisner. She had the sort of a voice a woman has who has got a nose like a eagle. But I couldn't tell who she was talking to, for nobody seemed to answer much at first.

"James," says she — "James, what are you doing there?"

No one answered, but I felt sure now she was talking to their gardener. So he was home!

"Who made that hole? Who has done this, James?" says she again. "Who made that hole in the wall?"

Still, he didn't answer none; and she went on:

"I see! It must of been some of them awful Wrights that live acrost there. How dare they break through our fence? I'll have them sued!"

"Oh, no, you won't. It was done from this side — I can tell you that."

I knew his voice. It was him.

"Whoever did it," he went on, "I'm going to close it up. I saw their dog in our yard the other day. Did you see him in here today?"

"No — that same awful little cur?" says she. "They are the worst people, James! I certainly am glad you want nothing to do with them, even their dog. But, of course, you couldn't."

"No; it seemed not," says he.

"What do you mean?" says she, harshlike. "As for that maid of theirs, I was inexpressibly shocked, James, when I found that you so far forgot yourself ——"

"I wouldn't say any more," says he.

"I shall say all I like, and you'll please remember who you are! The David Wisners can't afford to have it understood that they associate any way whatsoever with the Wright family. Not even our servants can visit acrost. I've been suspecting for some time."

"Well, that's plain enough," says he. "I don't see any use trying to make it any plainer. There's no use rubbing it in."

"If I had a servant," says she, right pointed, "who'd look at the best of them I'd discharge him as soon as I knew it. I've got my eye on Emmy, my second-floor maid, too. All I can say is, you'd all better be more careful, or, the first thing some of you know ——"

"Naturally," says he, "I can imagine that," says he. "It's hell to belong to the lower classes!"

"What do you mean, James?" says she, solemn. "I'll not have profanity from you! Besides, you talk like a socialist person, and I'll not have that."

"Socialist, eh? Well, I'll admit, if I had all the money in the world," says he, "no wall nor bars would make any difference to me. Nor they wouldn't when I didn't have."

"James, continually you shock me beyond words!" says she, gasping. "What words from one in your position in life!"

He didn't say much then, but only sort of growled, like he was mad.

"James," says she, "what on earth are you doing — what's that you're eating?"

"It's good old tobacco I'm eating," says he. "I found the brand out West and I've used no other since."

"James! James!" says she. "You to chew the filthy weed! It's impossible!"

"No, it ain't," says he. "You watch me and I'll show you how far it is from impossible. I chaw it and I like it, same as any other socialist; and I want you to understand, ma'am, that I'm my own man, tobacco and all, while I stay here. If you don't like it, fire me again!"

She begun to gasp again, like I heard her before.

"You don't care!" says she. "Nothing is sacred to you!"

Them two had me guessing. I'd heard of middle-age women getting infaturated with chauffores. Why not gardeners, then? Something was going on between them two, else why should she be so damned jealous? And why should he be so damned sassy to her? I wondered what Old Man Wisner would think if he knew what I knew now about his wife. Didn't this even things up some? I wouldn't tell him, of course; but didn't it beat all how many secrets I was getting into?

Them folks didn't have so much on us, after all; for that hired man was shore a gay bird, and playing both sides the fence. I seen he was a socialist, all right — but, Lord, her, with that face!

XXIII

TOM AND HER

TOM KIMBERLY he come to our house steady now. Every day he sent flowers in bundles, like he owned a flower ranch somewhere. Bonnie Bell put them in the dining-room, and the music room, and the reception parlors, and the staircase, and the bedrooms — and even in our ranch room.

"Whatever the papers says about bad crops, sis," says I one morning when a bunch of red roses come in about as big as a sheaf from a self-binder, "the flower crop is shore copious this year, ain't it? Likewise it seems to be getting better right along."

"He's a good boy," says she after a while — "a fine boy. And he comes of such a good family, and I like all his people so much. And Katherine — what could I do without Katherine?"

"Uh-huh!" says I. "Of course if you like a young man's sister, you ought to marry him. That stands to reason, don't it?" says I.

"And dad likes 'em all — Mr. Kimberly and Tom's mother."

"Shore he does! For all them reasons you ought to marry the boy. Never mind about love."

"They're the best people we've met in this town," says she, "and there aren't any better in any town. They're not only charming people but good people. They've everything you could ask, Curly."

"Yes," says I; "so it stands to reason you ought to marry that family," says I. "Here's them Better Things we come for. Love ain't in it."

You see, I was half her pa. Us two had raised her from a baby together. I couldn't tell the old man what I knew, but I had to talk to her like her pa would of talked. I allowed, if she'd get married to Tom Kimberly right quick, that'd sort of keep things from breaking loose the way they might, and keep me from having to tell Old Man Wright about the man next door. I knew plenty more about him now that I wouldn't tell her. I thought she'd forget him.

Well, she set around all that day sort of moping, with a green poetry book in her lap; and she had a letter in her hands. It didn't come by the Peanut route, neither, but by the postman. It was square.

"Tell me, is that from Tom Kimberly, Bonnie?" says I.

"It's absolutely none of your business, Mr. Curly Wilson," says she; "and I wouldn't tell you in any circumstances. But it is."

"Let me see it," says I.

"Indeed!" She looks me square in the face.

"Don't tell me a word, sis," says I. "I'm not so hard as you think."

"He's coming over tonight," says Bonnie Bell to me after a time.

"That's to get his answer?" asts I; and she nodded then.

"Well, Colonel," says I to the old man that evening when he come in and we was having a nip before dinner, "I reckon I got this thing all fixed up at last. It's been a hard pull for me, being half a pa to a girl like ours; but I done it."

"Is that so, Curly?" says he. "Well, it's been some chore, ain't it, for both of us? Well, how!"

When Old Man Wright taken a drink he never did say "Here's how!" He just said "How!" which is Western. When a man says "Here's how!" he comes from the East and is trying his best to hide it.

"How!" says I. "And a good health to the young and happy couple."

"What's that?" says he, sudden. "Has anything happened? She hasn't said anything to me. Why is she so tight-mouthed with me, Curly, and so free with you?"

"Oh, it's a way I have with women," says I.

"They all come and tell me their troubles. It's because I got red hair and a open countenance."

"Tell me, what's my girl confided to your red hair and open face?" says he. "I'd like to know."

"You notice a good many flowers around the last few weeks?" says I.

"I haven't noticed nothing else," says he.

"And that didn't make nothing occur to your mind?"

"Oh, yes, it did; only I didn't want to say anything to the kid — I didn't want to try to influence her in any way, shape or manner, in a time like this. Only I told her quite a while ago that Tom Kimberly was the only young man I seen in town that I'd allow to come around at all. I only said to her that the old man was my best friend and I liked Tom's ma as much as I could any woman with gray hair.

"Still, I said gray hair was all right for a grandma. Why, Curly," says he, "I been plumb thoughtful and tactful. I ain't said a word to let Bonnie Bell know what I thought about Tom Kimberly. I believe in leaving a young girl plumb free to follow her own mind and heart."

"Uh-huh! Yes, you do!" says I. "The truth is, Colonel, you believe in running the whole ranch here like you done out West. Now if you'd only keep out of this game and leave me alone in it you'd find things would come out a heap better," says I.

"But I just said I ain't said a word," says he. "She can do whatever she likes about getting married ——"

"Just so she married Tom Kimberly," says I. "Ain't that about it?"

"Well," says he at length, "maybe that's about it; yes."

I got up and went out of the room. I wouldn't talk to him no more. He wasn't noways consistent with hisself and every time I talked with him it got harder for me to hold down my job.

But, anyhow, Tom come over that night. He wouldn't go in the ranch room; but he made some sort of a talk about music, one thing or another, and he toled Bonnie Bell out into the music room. But she didn't play and he didn't. From there they must of went out into our flower house, which is called the conswervatory. I didn't hear anything then for a long time. Old Man Wright he goes off to bed at last, pleasant as if he'd ate all the canaries in the shop. Me, I wasn't so shore.

It wasn't right for me to think of them young people, I reckon; but I set there restless, knowing what was going on and how much it meant, and all the time wondering just what them two young folks was talking about. It made me feel sort of dreamy, too, and I begun to figure on this whole damn question of girls and young men. I begun to see that what Old Man Wright and me had worked for all our lives was just this one hour or so in our conswervatory. It was for her — that was all. If she chose right now she'd be happy, and so would we. But if she didn't, what was the use of all her pa's money and all her pa's work?

What chance for happiness would there be in this world for him if she wasn't happy? He loved the girl from the top of her head to her feet, like he'd loved her ma. He was wrapped up in her. If things didn't come right it was going to be mighty hard for him. He'd never get over anything that meant the unhappiness of Bonnie Bell.

So what Tom was doing in our conswervatory around ten or eleven o'clock was settling the happiness of Bonnie Bell and her pa — and me, if you can say I counted.

"Well," says I to myself at last, "this is the way the game is played in the cities. The girl's got to figure on heaps of things that don't bother so much in Wyoming. It ain't the same as if Bonnie Bell was pore and he was pore too. It's a good match — if any match can be good enough for her. She'll forget."

I could just almost see her standing there all in her pale-blue silk and little pale-blue slippers, with her hair done up in a band, like she was when she come down the stair that night, smiling but still ca'm, when she knew Tom was coming. I could see her——Aw, shucks! What's a cowpuncher got to do with things like that? I wisht I was out on the range, where I belonged.

I set there I don't know how long — maybe I went to sleep once or twice — when I heard the front door close easylike and knew somebody had went out — I didn't know who it was. I waited for a long time after that, but no one come in and no one spoke.

By and by I heard her dress rustle, and she come into our room, where I was setting.

She was white as a ghost — I never seen anyone as white as she was. She didn't know I was there, and she threw her hands up to her face and almost screamed when I moved. Then she went over to our rawhide lounge and set down, and held her hands together so tight I could see her knuckles was white. She knew I was there, but she didn't seem to see me.

I didn't say a word. When a woman's fighting out things in that way it ain't no time to meddle. I wisht I was out of there, but I didn't dare go. She set and looked at the fire and wrung her hands. Whenever you see a horse wring his tail, he's done for. Whenever you see a woman wring her hands that way, she's all in; and she's shore suffering. But I had to stay there and see her suffer.

"Bonnie," says I, "what is it?"

She turns her eyes on me, and they was wide open and awful.

"Curly," says she, "I'm in trouble. It's awful! I don't know ——"

"What's awful?" says I. "What's happened, Bonnie, girl? Tell old Curly, and he won't say a word to a living soul. I'm in with you, any sort of play — only don't look that way no more."

"Curly," says she, "it's come! I — I didn't know ——"

"What's come?" says I. "Tell old Curly, can't you? I'll help all I can."

She set for a while, and when she spoke it was only in a whisper.

"I — I'm a woman!" says she. "I didn't know! I'm — I'm a woman. I'm not a girl any more. I'm a woman. . . ."

She got up now and stood there as straight as though she was cut out of marble, and her silk dress hung round her legs, and she was still wringing her hands, and her eyes was wide open. But she wasn't crying.

"I didn't know," says she. "I never knew it would be this way. I didn't know."

"You didn't know what, Honey?" says I. "There's heaps of things we all don't know. But is there anything your old friend Curly can do for you now? Listen, sis, I've got you mighty much to heart," says I. "Tell old Curly, can't you, what's gone wrong? Your pa he's just gone to bed. Shall I go and get him?"

"No, no, no! For Gawd's sake, no! I can't see him — I could never tell him."

"It's got to be told," says I.

Then she nodded up and down, fastlike, and didn't say anything.

"It ain't really any of my business," says I, "but have you and him —— Well now ——"

"You men ——" She broke down. "You men — what do you know about a girl? What have you men done to me?"

"We done all in God Almighty's world we knew how to do for you," says I. "We'd of done more for you if we'd knowed how."

"Ah, is it so! You've made me the most unhappy girl in all the world."

I couldn't say a word to that. It went through me like a knife-cut. I was glad that Old Man Wright wasn't there to hear it. I seen then that him and me had failed. We could never play no other game, for this was the only girl we had.

"You've brought me here," says she, "and I've been like a prisoner. But I've done all I could."

"Didn't you like it here?" says I. "We done considerable on your account. Don't you like us none?"

"Like you, Curly?" says she. "I love you! I love you!"

She come now and taken me by the shoulders and shook me. I didn't know she was so strong before.

"I love you — love both of you," says she. "I'd die for you any minute," says she. "I'd try to cut my heart out for either of you now — if it come to that. I tried it now, tonight. I tried it for an hour — two hours. I didn't know what it meant before."

"He ast you, Bonnie?" says I.

"Yes, yes," says she. "The poor boy! I like him so much — I pity him."

"My Gawd! Bonnie, you haven't refused him?" say I. "You haven't done that? You haven't broke the pore fellow's heart?" says I. "Why did you ——"

"Why did you!" says she after me. "I told you he made it plain to me."

"What was it he made plain, Bonnie?" says I. "I suppose he, now, made some sort of love? It ain't for me to talk of that."

"Yes, yes!" She says it out sharp and high. "He did. I know now what it means to be a woman and in love. I never knew that before. But it wasn't — it wasn't for him! He held me — I was a woman — and it wasn't for him. How can I love —— What can I do? Why, I love you all, Curly — I love you all! I love Tom in one way; and I'm sorry, because he's good. But that isn't being a woman. It wasn't for him — it wasn't for him!"

She was sort of whispering by now.

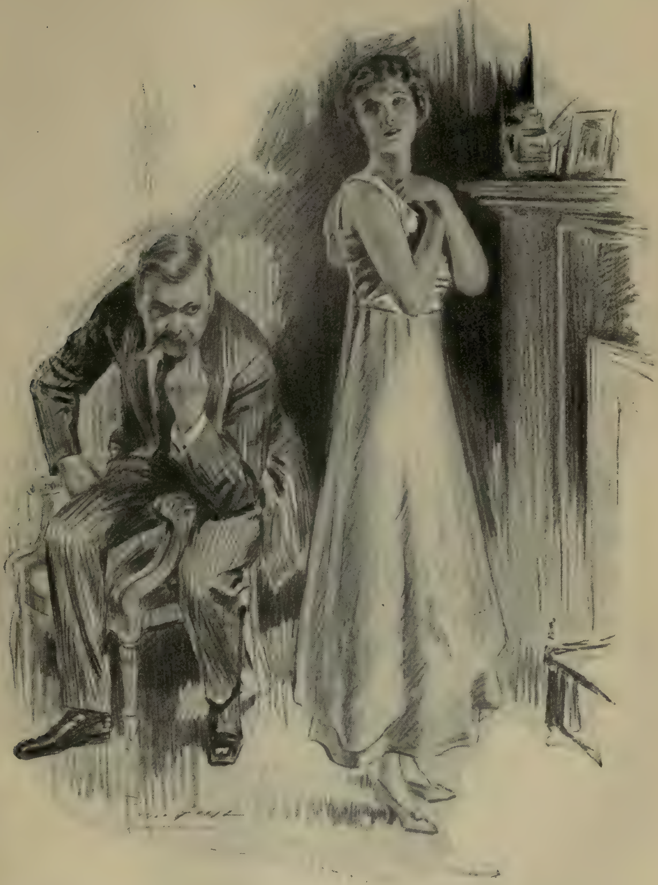
"So he went right away?" says I.

She nodded.

"Maybe I've broken his heart. I've broken yours and my father's and my own — all because I couldn't help being a woman. And I'm the unhappiest woman in all the world. I want to die! I don't know what to do. I want to be square and I don't know how."

"Bonnie," says I after a while, slow, "I know all about it now. You've been plumb crazy and you're crazy now. You've kept on remembering that low-down sneak next door. You've turned down a high-toned gentleman like Tom — and you done it for what? You ain't acted on the square, Bonnie Bell Wright," says I. "It ain't needful for me to tell all I know about him now. I could tell you plenty more."

"No," says she, and she was crying now; "it was an evil thing of me ever to listen to him. I've done wrong," says she. "But what must I do?" says she. "Must I lie all my life? I can't do that."



"'I know now what it means to be a woman and in love.'"

"Well, some women are able to — just a little," says I. "Maybe you'd get over that business of that man next door if you was married and had a few kids of your own running around. You'd be happy with Tom. We'd all be happy. You'd forget — of course you'd forget. Women are built that way," says I. "I reckon I know!"

"Curly ——" And, though she looked just like she always had, young and white and beautiful, and fit only to be loved by anybody, her face had something in it that made her look old, real old, like one of them statutes in our front yard.

She was twenty-three, and pretty as anything ever made in marble — and white as anything in marble; but she looked a thousand years old as she stood there then. There was something in her face that seemed to come down from 'way back in the past. She was — well, I reckon she was what she said — a woman!

"Curly," says she, "some women may be able to forget. It's the easiest way — maybe most of them do it. The average woman lives that way. But I can't, Curly; I can't — it isn't in my blood. Women like me have got to follow their own hearts, Curly — no matter what it means.

"I tried with all my heart to lie to Tom tonight. I even told him I wouldn't answer now — even told him to come back again after while; but I knew all the time I couldn't lie forever. I knew I could love some man — a man — but it wasn't for him. I'm like my father and like my mother, Curly. Do you want to crush the life out of me? Do you want to make me do something we'd all regret as long as ever we lived?"

She stopped talking then; but, sort of swinging around, she went on:

"It's been but a little while, Curly," says she. "It's been but such a little time! I don't know whether I can get over it — I don't know whether I can forget. But, oh, Curly, for one hour let me open my heart — for just this time let me be a woman! . . . But it wasn't for him!"

And now she was whispering again.

"I'm a thief, Curly!" says she after a while. "I've stolen your life and dad's. I've taken all you gave me. I don't deserve it."

"Oh, yes, you do," says I; "you deserved all we done for you. We loved you, Honey, and we do now."

"But you can't any more, Curly," says she. "I've been a thief. I've stolen your lives — from you two big, splendid men. But, oh! give me my hour — the one hour out of all my life.

"I stole from him too — from Tom," says she. "I've taken from him what I didn't pay for and can't. I never can. At least I can't until I've had — my hour.

"A woman has to face things all her life, Curly," says she; "and always she says: 'Well, let it be!' She takes her losses, Curly, and sometimes she forgets. But if she ever forgets what is in my heart tonight — if she forgets that — then life is never worth while to her again. There's nothing to do then — it's all a sham and a fraud. If that's what life means I don't want to live any more."

"Bonnie," says I, "you mustn't talk that way." I sort of drew her down on my knee now, and pushed her hair back and looked at her. "Listen at you — you that used to be up in the morning so early and hoorahing all through the ranch — your cheeks red with the sun, and your hair blowing, and your eyes like a deer's! Why, nothing but life was in the world for you then — nothing but just being alive."

"I wasn't a woman then, Curly," says she. "I didn't know."

"I didn't neither," says I; "and I don't know now."

"You can't," says she. "It's terrible! I'm — I think I'll go now."

She taken herself off my knee then; and, the first thing I know, she was gone.

I stayed there looking at the place where she'd been. I knew that now there shore was hell to pay!

XXIV

HOW BONNIE BELL LEFT US ALL

I NEVER went to bed none at all that night. I couldn't of slept, nohow. I set there in the ranch room thinking and trying to figure out what I had ought to do. I concluded that might depend some on what Bonnie Bell was going to do; and I couldn't tell what that was, for she didn't seem clear about it herself.

Along about daybreak, maybe sooner, when I set there — maybe I'd been asleep once or twice a little — I heard the noise of a car going out not far from us. I suppose, like enough, it was over at the Wisners'; maybe some of their folks was going or coming. In the city, folks don't use the way they do on a ranch and night goes on about the same as daytime.

I'd been studying so hard over all these things, trying to see how I'd have to play the game, that I didn't notice Old Man Wright when he come in that morning, about the time he usual got up for breakfast. He wasn't worried none, but seemed right happy, like something was clear in his mind.

"Well, Curly," says he, "you're up right early, ain't you? What makes you so keen to hear the little birds sing this morning?"

He fills up his pipe. I didn't say nothing.

"Well," says he after a time, smoking and looking out the window, "I suppose I'm a fond parent again right now. Maybe I'll be a grandpa before long — who can tell? I never did figure on being a grandpa in my born days," says he; "but such is life."

"What do you mean, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Well," says he, "I ain't a real grandpa yet, maybe, but I reckon it's like enough. All them flowers and that sort of thing — and that late executive session last night. When's the day?"

He still looks right contented. What could I say to him then?

"Too bad," says he, "you couldn't of stayed up to get the happy news, Curly!" says he. "I expect Tom Kimberly would of been right glad to tell you or me; but I knew how the thing was going. I been a young man once myself. He don't want old people setting round — he wants the whole field clear for hisself. It takes young folks several hours sometimes to set and tell things to each other that could be told in just a minute. Proposing is a industrial waste, the way it's done customary.

"Well, well!" he goes on. "I'm glad my little girl's going to be so happy. She's a good girl and she loves her pa. Sometimes I even think she's right fond of you, Curly," says he. "I can't see why. You're a mighty trifling man, Curly," says he. "I don't see why I keep you."

Then I knowed he was feeling good. He wouldn't turn me off noways in the world, but he liked to joke thataway sometimes.

"Well," says he after a while, "what do you say about it your own self, Curly?"

"I say she loves you as much as any girl ever did her pa. She loves me, too, though I don't know why, neither."

"Shore she does!" he nods. "And she'll do the square thing by us two — that's shore."

"Is it?" says I. "Well, who knows what's the square thing in the world? Sometimes it's hard to tell what is."

"That's so," says he, thoughtful. "Sometimes it is. I might of liked some other man better'n Tom, maybe, if there'd been any other man; but there isn't. I'm glad she's taken him. He'll turn out all right. He's a good boy and his folks is good. He'll come out all right — don't you worry."

"No," says I; "I reckon it'll do no good to worry, Colonel."

"What do you mean?" says he. "Ain't it all right?" says he.

"That remains to be saw," says I.

"She accepts him, don't she?"

"If I knew I'd tell you," says I; "but I don't know for shore."

"Of course," he says to me, "the girl wouldn't be apt to talk very free to you about it, especial since you was in bed."

"Was I?" says I. "Oh, all right, if I was in bed! If I didn't talk to Bonnie Bell a while here last night, then everything is done, and I'm glad to know it."

"Well, where's she now?" says he. "I'm hungry as all get out; and you know I can't eat till she comes down to breakfast — I've got to have her setting right across the table from me, like her ma used to set. Oh, hum! I suppose some day she won't be setting there no more. Just you and me'll be setting there, looking at each other like two damn old fools. That's what fathers is for, Curly," says he. "That's the best they can get out of the draw.

"Well, that's what I've been living for ever since she was knee-high — just to make her happy; just to give her, like her ma told me I must, the place in life that she had coming to her. No little calico dress and a wide hat for Miss Mary Isabel Wright now, I reckon, Curly. Her game is different now. Them Better Things is coming her way, I reckon now, Curly. She's left the ranch and is playing a bigger game —

and she's won it. Well, I'll tell 'em both how glad I am; but I wisht she'd come down to breakfast, for I'm getting right hungry."

She didn't come. I couldn't say anything to him yet, for I didn't exactly know what the truth was; Bonnie Bell hadn't told me whether or not she accepted Tom, but only said he was going to come back again. I wisht she'd come down and take this thing off my hands, for I was getting cold feet as shore as you're born.

He walks up and down, getting hungrier all the time, and singing "Tom Bass He Was a Ranger!" But she didn't come. At last he calls our William; and says he to William:

"Go send Annette up to ask Miss Bonnie if she's ready for breakfast."

"Yes, sir; very well, sir. Hit's all growing quite cold, sir," says William; and he went away.

He come back in a few minutes and stood in the door and said his Ahum! like he always did, and the old man turned to him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Miss Wright's mide says Miss Wright 'as not come in."

"Not come in! What do you mean?"

"She's not in her room, sir. The mide thinks she's not been in her room during the night."

"What's that? What's that?" says he. "Curly, didn't you just now say she was here? Wasn't you up after I was?"

"I seen her around midnight," says I—"maybe later; I don't know. I thought she went to bed. I never did hear her go out. She couldn't of gone out—I'd of heard her."

"You'd of heard her! With you in bed yourself? What do you mean?"

The old man turned to me now and seen my face. He come close up to me.

"Where was you?" says he. "What do you mean?"

"Colonel," says I, "she was here after midnight. I ain't been to bed at all tonight."

"What did she say to you? Why didn't you go to bed? Where is she? What have you done?"

"I ain't done nothing," says I. "I've been trying to talk to you for days, and I couldn't. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to interfere in any girl's business and this shore is hers."

"It's hers?" says he, cold and hard. "I'm in this too. There's something in here that's got to come out. Come!" says he.

He motioned to me and I followed him up the staircase to the part of the house that was Bonnie Bell's—the second story and on the corner toward the lake. She had a fine, big bedroom, with wide windows, all the wood in white, and all the silks a sort of pale green.

We walked into the room; and he didn't knock. The room was empty! Her bed hadn't been slept in. On a chair, smoothed out, was her pale blue dress, which I remembered.

"That's the one she wore last," says I, pointing to it. "She's changed it."

"She's — she's gone!" says her pa. "Gone — without asking me — without telling me! Where's she gone? Tell me, Curly. Has — has anybody —— My girl — where is she? Tell me!"

He had hold of my shoulders then and shook me; and I ain't no chicken neither.

I got a look at the bed then, and there was something on the pillow. I showed it to him. It was a letter.

If you've ever seen a man shot, you know how it gets him. He'll stand for a time like he ain't hurt so bad. Then his face'll pucker, surprised, and he'll begin to crumble down slow. That was the way Old Man Wright done when he read the letter. It was like he was shot and trying to stand and couldn't, only a little while.

"She's — she's gone!" says he, like he was talking to someone else. "She's run away — from me! She's gone, Curly!" He says it over again, and this time so loud you could of heard it for a block. "Our girl's left here — left her father after all! Curly, tell me, what was this? Could she — did she —— How could she?"

I taken the piece of paper from his hand when he didn't see me. It said:

> Father [I never knew her to call him that before] Father, I'm going away. I'm a thief. I've broken your heart and Curly's and Tom's. I'm the wickedest girl in the world; and I'll never ask your forgiveness, for I don't deserve it. You must not look for me any more. I'm going away. Good-by!

Well, that was all. The letter had been all over wet — and a man can't cry.

"Curly," says her pa to me —"why, Curly, it can't be! She's hiding — she's just joking; she wouldn't do this with her old pa. She's scared me awful. Come on, let's find her, and tell her she mustn't do this way no more. There's some things a man can't stand."

"Colonel," says I, "we got to stand it. She's gone and it ain't no joke."

"How do you know?" He turned on me savage now. "Damn you! What do you know? There's nothing wrong about my girl — you don't dare to tell me that there is! She couldn't do no wrong; it wasn't in her."

"No," says I; "she wouldn't do anything but what she thought was right, I reckon. But, you see, you and me, we never knew her at all. I didn't till last night about half past twelve or one o'clock."

"What do you mean? What did she say?"

"She told me she'd got to be a woman."

He stood and looked at me; and now I seen I had to come through, for the girl couldn't be saved no more.

"Oh, hell, Colonel," says I, "I might of known all along the thing would have to come out — it was due to break some day. I ought to of told you, of course."

"What do you mean?" says he; and he caught me once more in his hands — he's strong too.

"Turn me loose, Colonel!" says I. "There can't no man put hands on me — I won't have it. I worked for you all my life pretty near, and I done right, near as I knew. Turn loose of me!"

He let go easy like, but kept his eyes on me.

"I want to be fair," says he, and he half whispered —"I want to be fair; but, the man that's done this'll have to settle with me! Tell me, did you and her plot against me?"

"I didn't plot none," says I. "I was only hoping she'd forget all about it and get married and settle down."

"Forget about what? Did she have any affairs that you knew about?"

I nods then. I was glad to get it off'n my mind.

"Yes," says I; "she did."

"Who was it, Curly?" says he, quiet.

"It was the man next door — the Wisners' hired man," says I.

I'd rather of shot Old Man Wright and killed him decent than say what I did then.

"You're a damn liar!" says he to me at length, quiet like.

"Colonel," says I, "you can't call that to me, nor no other man, and you know it."

"I do call it to you!" says he. "My girl couldn't of done that."

"I wish I was a liar, Colonel," says I; "but I ain't. I'll give you one day to take that back, and you ain't going to study about no proofs neither. I've worked for you a long time. I've loved the girl like you did. It ain't no way for you to do to talk thataway to me. I'll say I've knew this some time and tried to stop it — it was my business to stop it. I tried a hundred times to tell you about it, but I couldn't without pretty near killing her and you too. She ast me not to tell you and — why, hell! I loved her, same as you did."

"How far has it gone, Curly?" says he. He come over now and patted his hand up and down my shoulder, looking away, which was his way of saying he was sorry. "Don't mind me, Curly," says he. "I'm crazy! You mustn't mind me, but tell me all you know now. I know you couldn't lie to either of us if you tried."

"Yes, I could too," says I; "but I haven't tried. But I just couldn't go to you and tell you all this thing, for I knew what it would mean to you.

"It's been going on quietlike for quite a while and I've been doing all I could to stop it. It begun maybe when she hauled him out of the lake — I don't know. They didn't meet often. I heard 'em talking once on the dock, and I told him I'd run him off if he come across the fence or said another word to her. She begged for him then; but I never promised her nothing. I knew it was my job as your foreman to take care of that, so I didn't go to you."

"Go on," says he. "Tell me!"

"She didn't say nothing to him for a long time — she didn't meet him, not after she said she wouldn't. Then he sent letters over — tied to the collar of our little dog — two or three letters; maybe four or five, for all I know. He was crazy over her. All the time he owned up to her and me that he oughtn't to do what he done. He said in his letters he oughtn't to raise his eyes to her — he knowed he ought to of come around to the front door and not to the back door; and he said that very thing. But he said, like a man will, that he couldn't help it.

"She didn't never answer his letters, so far as I know. I don't know as she ever got any word to him at all. So far as I know, they never did talk much, only that one time when I heard 'em. But, as to something going on — why, yes, it's been going on for quite a little while. And I've knew it; I've knew I ought to go and tell you. And all the time I couldn't, because I loved her and she ast me not to tell."

"Did she ever tell you anything? Do you think she cared anyway for him? You see," he goes on, "I never seen him to know him. I don't know who he is. I didn't hardly know he was alive on earth. Gawd forgive me! I ought to of known. I told her once not to talk to that hired man; but if I'd thought anything of this I'd maybe of killed him then."

"Yes; and I ought to of told you, Colonel," says I. "It was only the way things happened and because she ast me not to."

"She had that secret from her father!" says he, slow. "Who can tell what's in a woman's heart?"

"That's it," says I; "now you got it. She was a woman — she told me so."

"What more did she say, Curly?"

"Once she come to me crying, and she says:

'Curly, I love him!'— she meant that man next door. And I know for shore now he wasn't fit to wipe her feet on."

Old Man Wright he set down then, quiet like. I couldn't help him none. I had to set and see him take it. It was awful.

"She said that — she loved him? How long ago?"

"A few weeks, maybe," says I. "I never could get the nerve to tell you then. I hoped she'd get to see how foolish it was for her to care for a cheap gardener — I thought she'd be too proud for that. And then I allowed she'd, like enough, marry Tom Kimberly, and that'd change her and it'd all come out all right. All the time I was hoping and trying to save both her and you. I been nigh about crazy, Colonel. And all the time, of course, I was only a damn fool cowpuncher, without any brains."

"She's gone!" says he, after a time.

"Yes," says I; "near as I can figure, she's thought about it all night and concluded it'd be best for her not to marry Tom, feeling like she did about this other man. She's shook us, Colonel. But, believe me, she wasn't never happy doing that. It must of been like death to her."

"Why did she do it, Curly?" he whispered. "How could she? Why?"

"I done told you, Colonel," says I. "It was because she found she was a woman. She hadn't knew that before — nor us neither."

At length he got up, but he couldn't stand up straight.

"How can we keep this quiet?" says he.

We couldn't keep it quiet at all. It was all over the house right now. That Annette girl had read all them Peanut letters before William ever got 'em. Like enough he'd read 'em too. They was scared when we walked into their part of the house.

"Where's that dog?" says Old Man Wright.

William, he got pale.

"Very good, sir," says he, and pretends to go after Peanut, which he knows wasn't there.

"Hi suppose she took 'im along with 'er, sir," says William after a while.

Annette she chips in:

"*Oui, oui* — yes, yes; she took him with her."

"Took him with her? What do you mean? What do you know about it? Keep quiet, you people!" says Old Man Wright. "Get into that room!" He locked them in.

"Now, Curly ——" says he.

I knew he was clear in his own mind by now that the girl had run away with that gardener. He'd maybe go over there.

"No, Colonel," says I; "you keep out of this."

"What do you mean?" says he. "Ain't you my friend at all? Ain't I got a friend in all the world?"

"You're alderman here," I says, "and that's the same as being sher'f. When you was sher'f you couldn't do what the law said you couldn't — now could you? You have to keep up the law when you're a alderman or sher'f. With me, it's different. Besides, this is my job, not yours."

"Curly," says he, and I could see his jaw get hard all along the aidge, "Curly, ain't there no place on earth for a pore old broken-hearted man?"

"Never mind just yet, Colonel," says I. "It ain't your turn," says I —"that's all. Sometimes," I says to him, "it's best to go a little slow at first and not make no foolish breaks. Let's just take it easy till we see which way the cat has jumped — we don't know much yet."

"She — she wouldn't kill herself?" says he sudden; and he got even whiter.

"I don't think so," I says; "and I'll tell you why. I don't think she was thinking so much of dying when she said 'I am a woman.' It was life!"

He looked at me quiet.

"She said that?"

Uh-huh! — sever'l times. And it was like you said, Colonel, after all. There ain't no fence high enough to keep a young man and a young woman apart. It was bound to come, and we didn't know it — that's all."

"We give her every chance. There was Tom."

"Yes," says I; "and there was the man next door. These things goes by guess and by Gawd. For instance," says I, "what in the world could Bonnie Bell's ma ever see in you, Colonel?"

That hit him hard, though I didn't mean it that way. He turned his face away, like he seen something awful before him.

"My Gawd!" says he. "I done that my own self! I stole her ma away. She loved me and I loved her. Ain't there no one to show a pore old helpless man what he ought to do?"

"It's life, and she showed us the way," says I. "When you stole Bonnie Bell's ma you was ready to meet her folks, I reckon, if they come to take her away. You taken your chance when you married her. So's the man that's run off with Bonnie Bell. Let him have a even break, Colonel. He loves her, maybe — and he seems to have a way with women."

"He's ruined her!" says Old Man Wright. "It's marriage he was after, of course; but look at the difference. I never touched a cent of her ma's money. We made our own way. But here's a low-down sneak that's come in at our back door and run away with my girl for her money! Don't you see the difference?

What's this skunk like?" he says to me after a time.

"He ain't such a bad-looking fellow," says I, "if he was dressed up. He's a sort of upstanding fellow. His clothes was always so dirty he didn't look like much. He was a good-talking fellow enough."

"They all are — the damn fortune-hunting curs! I can believe that."

"I was too much a coward to tell you, Colonel," says I. "I love that girl a awful lot. I'd do anything I could to help the kid, even now when she's in so bad."

"Yes," says he.

"She had it in her natural," says I. "Her pa and ma run away. She was plumb gentle till she bolted — and then all hell couldn't hold her. Ain't that like her pa?"

"Yes," says he, humble; "it's like her pa."

"And she's handsome, and soft, and kind, and gentle — so any man couldn't help loving her. Ain't she like her ma thataway? Wasn't she thataway too?"

"Yes," says he, choking up like; "she's like her ma."

"Well, then?" says I. "Well then?"

So I pushed him outen the room and went on out down the walk.

I looked around at our house as I was going out.

It was big and fine, but somehow the curtains looked dull and dirty to me. Everything was shabby-looking someways. This place was where we'd failed. And then I seemed to see my own self like I was — Curly, a bow-legged cowpuncher offen the range, with no use for him in the world but just to get things mixed up, like I had. And Old Man Wright — that used to be our sher'f and the captain of the round-up, and the best cowman in Wyoming — what had come to him here at this place?

I turned around to look back. Just then he come out the room where I'd pushed him in.

He was a tall man, but now he stood stooped down like. His red mustache was ragged where he'd gnawed the ends for the last half hour. His face seemed different colors and wasn't red like usual. He seemed to have got leaner all at once. His knees didn't seem to keep under him good and his back was bowed. He'd changed a lot in less than a hour. He seemed to be thinking of what I was thinking of, and he sort of taken a look around at the house too.

"I made it, Curly," says he, and his voice was sort of loose and trembling, like he was old. "I made it for her. I made a lot of money for her. I tried to make her believe I was happy here, but I never was. I ain't been happy here, not a hour since we come. It's all been a mistake."

He hammers his fist on the wall by the door where he stood.

"Brick on brick," says he, "I built it for her. I pretended I liked all these things, but I didn't care a damn for 'em. It's all been a bluff; we've bluffed to each other and we've all been wrong. It's been a failure; all we tried to do for her has been no good. She's throwed us down. Curly, I don't count for nothing no more."

It was true, all he'd said. We'd played our little game and lost it. I never felt so bow-legged in my life, or so red-headed, as I did when I turned to walk down from our house to Wisner's. I looked back just once. There was Old Man Wright standing in the door, tall and bent over, a hand against each side of the door frame.

I left him there, holding onto the frame of the front door of what he called our home, that he'd worked so hard for — that we'd both tried so hard to make her happy in. He'd found one game at last where he couldn't win.

And she'd shook us now — our girl — shook us for a man that never had knocked at our front door!

XXV

ME AND THEM

I WAS almost down to our front gate, with half a notion to go over and have a talk with them Wisner people, when I heard our William calling to me; he'd got out of the room where we locked him up and run around the back of the house.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson! Mr. Wilson!" says he. "Hi beg of you, don't!" says he; and he come running after me.

"What's the matter with you?" I ast him.

"Hi beg your pardon, sir," says he; "but Hi'm most deeply concerned in hall of this," he says.

"What do you mean, you shrimp?" says I. "Have you been mixed up in anything here?"

"Hit was the mide across the way, sir — across the wall, that is to say. Well, perhaps Hi've been too attentive to their Hemmy, sir, from the hupper-story window; but she was that pretty and so fond of me! Hi 'ope Hi did no wrong, sir; but you see, sometimes when all was quite still, sir, Hi did flash a light across from my window on 'ers, and we did 'ave a 'appy time, sir, come midnight — quite silent, sir, and quite far apart; quite respectable, Hi assure you, sir — nothing more — all above the wall; for otherwise Hi couldn't 'ave seen 'er at all."

"Was you busy with that sort of thing about one or two o'clock this morning?" I ast him. "I want to know what you done — what happened?"

"A great deal 'appened, sir. Quite without plan, I saw a man appear at the window of this 'ouse across the wall; 'e was right by the window and looking across. At first Hi thought 'e was looking at my window and Hi stepped back, not wishing to compromise a lady like Hemmy — that being the 'ousemide's name across the wall, sir."

"What was this man doing?"

"Hi cawn't 'ardly tell, sir. 'E looked and 'e made some motions. There seemed a light on 'is window too; in fact, all between the two 'ouses seemed quite bright at the time, what with 'im and what with me. A short time afterwards a car went out."

I turned on down toward the gate.

"Oh, Hi beg of you," says he, "to say nothing over there. Knowing as Hi do that both you and Mr. Wright are very violent men, and caring as Hi do for Hemmy, the 'ousemide, sir, Hi feel most uneasy — Hi do, indeed."

"Well, if that's the way you feel, William," says I, "you go on back in the house."

"You don't mean any violence, Hi 'ope, sir?"

"I don't know yet what I mean; but go on back in."

He turns around just about in time, for now I seen two or three people coming in at our front gate. I didn't know any of them. They was young fellows. One of them ast me if I knew anything about the alleged elopement. Then I seen word had got out somehow — like enough from our Annette or their Emmy, and these was maybe newspaper reporters come up to see about it.

"I haven't heard of any elopement," says I. "I was just calling our butler down for flirting some with one of their hired girls over there."

"May we talk to your butler?" ast one of them.

"No; you can't," says I, "because he's gone in to see about breakfast."

One of the young fellows looked up and sort of scratched his head with a lead pencil.

"I say," says he, "are we on a high love story or one of the servants' quarters? Tell us, friend"— he says to me —"can't you help us out on this?"

"It ain't in my line of business," says I; "but it seems plain, if their hired man has run away with our maid, or our butler run away with theirs, it ain't story enough to bother a alderman or his foreman about before breakfast."

"Well, lemme get a picture of the wall, anyways," says he; and he done that before I could help it.

"Have you got one of your butler?" he ast.

"No, we ain't; and you can't get none. We don't bother about the lower classes," says I.

So they laughed and bimeby went on away. I give them some cigarettes — all I had; and they said I was a good scout, like enough.

Well, of all the papers that tried to get a story that morning, not one printed a word except one. It come out with about a colyum in the paper all about a mysterious disappearance in Millionaire Row. It allowed that nobody could tell who had disappeared, but some said that Old Man Wisner had run off with one of Alderman Wright's hired girls, and others said that Old Man Wright had eloped with Mrs. Wisner, while others declared that the Wrights' butler had eloped with the second-floor maid of the Wisner household; though still others insisted the Wisner gardener had disappeared with the heiress of Alderman Wright, the well-known citizen whose re-election at the coming term was practically assured.

That paper printed some pictures too —one of Old Man Wisner and one of Bonnie Bell, allowing that he was our butler and the one of Bonnie Bell was the picture of the second-floor maid of the Wisner household. I reckon they had them pictures already in their newspaper office. But they printed a new picture of the Wisner wall and said some more funny things about that, like they had before.

This wasn't no funny time for us. The next day there was a big fire or something, and all those people got to writing about something else; and they let us alone.

After they'd gone away that morning Old Man Wright ast me if I'd learned anything. Then I told him about how William had made signs that morning across the wall to people in that house.

"Now it seems to me like this, Colonel," says I: "I never went to sleep that night, and neither did Bonnie Bell. When she seen them lights on the windows, maybe she went to her own window. He was maybe standing there and seen her. Maybe she seen him. Maybe all at once it come over her that she'd have to — she'd have to —— Well, you know what I mean."

He nodded then.

"You see, it must of come over the pore girl all at once," says I; for, to save my life, I couldn't help trying to excuse her every way I could. "She hadn't sent no word over to him and he hadn't got no word to her for weeks so far as I knew. It must of all come to them both just in that one minute. It was like cap and powder — you can't help the explosion then. I reckon maybe she's somewhere — with him."

"Yes; with him!" breaks out Old Man Wright. "It was neck against neck — me and Wisner. I had him beat; I'd of had him on his knees. And now he's put the greatest disgrace on us any man could of figured out, no matter how hard he tried — his hired man has run away with my daughter! I could of laughed at Wisner once. Can I laugh at him now?"

"That ain't the worst," says I.

"No," says he; "it ain't the worst. The worst is, she's married a low-down cur that's been after her money all this time. All this time, Curly — and I didn't know it. And you let him go thataway — right here; you heard the wheels that took 'em away!"

"Yes, Colonel," says I; "that's true. Now it's a little late, but I'm going to get on this job the best I know how from this time down. That means I've got to go away from town for a little while, Colonel. I want you to set here and leave this thing to me. Please don't say 'No' to that. I may need you after a while — in case I locate them. Since the newspapers has got fooled by this thing we pulled off this morning, maybe the best thing I can do is to go away while things is quiet.

"Stay here, then, Colonel," says I. "Don't drink no more and no less than you been doing. If anybody comes tell them Bonnie Bell is sick. Wait till you hear from me."

XXVI

HOW I WENT BACK

I ARGUED that when you look for a man who has done a crime you got to figure on what he said and done last, so as to get a line on what he's going to do next; and when I come to study over that hired man had mostly said to me I remembered it was about Wyoming and ropes and cows — things like that. I knowed he was batty, like so many people is, about Western things — not that Western men is any different from anybody else, though a lot of people think they are.

Now I figured that the place he'd make a break to was, like enough, the range. He'd told me he knowed the Circle Arrow, too, his boss being a whole lot interested in the Circle Arrow.

I put one thing together with another; and, without saying anything to Old Man Wright about it, I bought a ticket for the Yellow Bull country and pulled out for there as fast as I could go.

It was a good bet. When I got to the station for our old ranch, below Cody, forty miles from where our ranch was when we lived there, there wasn't very many people around the station that I knew. A good many new men was there, with wide hats, and leggings on their legs, and breeches that buttons on the side — folks that had come out West to be right Western. Most of 'em come out to raise bananas on the Yellow Bull and be gentlemen farmers, I reckon.

I looks around among these people for a good while. None of them paid much attention to me. At last I seen him. Yes; it was that hired man. He was getting ready to drive out of town with a pair of mules hitched to a buckboard. He was fixing in some boxes and things. I knowed him in a minute.

But where was she? I waited to see if Bonnie Bell would come out anywhere; but she didn't.

I walked over to him; and he seen me standing there looking at him just as he was going to pull out. I went on over and got onto the seat with him.

"Drive right on straight out of town," says I, quiet. "Don't say anything. Just act like nothing had happened," says I.

Under my coat I pushed the muzzle of my gun into his ribs. He looked straight ahead and done what I told him to. If he was scared bad he didn't let on.

"I haven't got any gun," says he after a while. "I don't pack one."

"I haven't packed one for years myself," says I.

"Sometimes a man has to pack one for coyotes and such things," says I.

He got kind of red in his face, but he didn't say anything.

"I'm just that kind of a man — when it comes to a show-down I don't care what happens," says I. "And I reckon you see it's a show-down now. Tell me where she is."

"She's out at our place," says he; "forty miles or so — you know where it is. I've got the Arrow Head Spring homestead; I bought it a while ago. I've got a few cows — not many. You see," says he, "I've saved a little money — not a whole lot. Our property isn't paid for yet. We've got a quarter section, but you know the range is in back of it. We think we can make some sort of a start."

"With her? Her that was used to so much?" says I. "Are you married? But, of course, that was what you was after — her money, not her."

He flushed plumb red then, and sort of swallowed several times.

"You think high of me and her, don't you, Curly?" says he.

I seen that, after all, I was too late; and my gun dropped down into the bottom of the buckboard, and neither of us noticed it.

"You married her — our girl," says I, "that we'd tried so hard to get a place for? She could of owned the whole ranch — and you give her forty acres, part paid for! That's fine — for the girl we loved so much!"

"You don't love her no more than I do," says he. "You never tried harder for her than I'll try for her. Love — why, what do you know about it? If she hadn't loved me do you think she'd of done what she done and run away with me? Do you think she'd of broke her father's heart and forgot all that had been done for her if it hadn't been for love? If it hadn't been for thinking of those things we'd be the happiest two young fools in all the world. We are now! She's some happy anyway. But it breaks my own heart to think she isn't any happier."

After a while he goes on:

"What could I do, Curly? It's a awful thing to love a woman this way; it's a terrible thing. There's no sense nor reason about it at all," says he. "But now if I only could have had any decent chance ——"

"Pick up your gun," says he after a while; "it might fall out."

We rode on for quite a while. He made like he was going to reach into his pocket for something and I covered him quick, but he only hauled out a piece of Arrow Head plug. He offered me a chaw, absent-minded.

"No," says I; "I can't take no chaw of tobacco with such as you."

He put it back in his pocket, then, and didn't take none his own self. His face was right red and troubled now.

"Curly," says he, "what am I going to do? What's right to do? I hadn't much to give up, but such as it was I give it up gladly for her; I'd give up everything in the world — if I had everything — for her. That's what she means to me," says he. "We are so much to one another that I haven't any time to be scared of you. We haven't got around to that yet — not that I'm so cheap as to believe you're bluffing; I know you're not."

"No, I ain't," says I. "This thing has got to be squared and I come out here to square it. I know your record — I've heard you talk to more'n one woman. You've got a cast iron nerve," says I; "but it won't do you no good. Drive right on now till I tell you to stop."

"If you want to kill her too," says he, "all right — then shoot me down. Ride on out then and explain to her what you've done. Look at her face the way it will be then. Maybe you can tell then whether she cares anything for me or not. Do you want to see a woman's face looking thataway — see it all your life? And do you think you can square things or end things by killing me or her, or both of us? Maybe you'd murder more — who knows? We're man and wife. Would that square things, Curly? I don't know much myself, but I don't seem to think it would."

It was curious, but it seemed like it was true — he didn't seem to have got around to thinking of whether he was in danger or not. And I knowed he wasn't running any cheap bluff, neither, any more than me. He looked right on ahead and didn't pay no attention to my gun.

"Curly," says he, "you didn't make this and you can't end it. This is a case of man and woman, the way God made them. 'Male and female made He them.' If I died today — if she did too — I'd thank God that we had gone this far anyways together.

"Why," says he, going on like he was half talking to hisself, "I didn't believe in anything much — I was a atheist and a socialist — till I saw her. I couldn't see anything much worth while in the world — till I saw her. I didn't want to do or be anything much — till I saw her. And now, I see it all — everything! I see how much worth while the world is, and how much worth while she is and I am, and how much worth while other people are too. I just didn't know it before — till I saw her. Then I knew what life was all about. Do you think you can settle this now, or help it, Curly? No; it's too late."

We drove on quite a little way yet.

"Curly," says he at last, "I've made my talk. If any man says I married Bonnie Bell for anything but love — the best and cleanest of love — he's making the cruelest mistake in the world; and he's a damned liar too. You ask her, Curly."

"What's that?" says I. "Me ask her? I didn't come for that. I couldn't look at her. That girl can get my goat any station. I don't want to talk to her."

"But you wouldn't of lynched a cow thief on the range in the old days on such a showing as this."

"Thief?" says I to him. "She said she was a thief — she'd stole the life and happiness of her pa and others ——"

"That's true," says he quiet like. "When you think of it, all life is only a theft every way. Each human being steals from all others. That's the way the world goes on. The coming generation steals always from the one that has gone by. Tell me, is that wrong? And tell me, can you and I judge if it is?"

I set and thought for quite a while, trying to figure out things. I couldn't. At last I reached up and threw my gun away into the sage.

XXVII

HOW I QUIT OLD MAN WRIGHT

I WENT back to the railroad station as soon as a wagon come along that would give me a ride, about half a hour after I left the hired man in the buckboard. Then I went on up to Cody. When I got there I done what anybody who knows cowpunchers knows I'd do in them circumstances. I certainly did run true to form.

First, I went to the telegraph office and sent a telegram to Old Man Wright: "Don't do nothing till you hear from me." Next, I showed I was a good business man by going and buying a railroad ticket back to Chicago; and I left it and ten dollars with the clerk at the hotel.

It might of been seven or eight days I was busy celebrating my losing my job like a cowpuncher almost always does. Having so much money it took me quite a while to finish decorating Cody the way I liked it best. Still, after a while, being down to ten dollars and the railroad ticket, I concluded to go back home.

When I got back to Chicago I found Old Man

Wright setting right where I'd left him and he looked like he really hadn't done nothing since. His hair was right long and his face was full of whiskers.

"Well, I found 'em," says I.

"What did you do, Curly?" says he.

"I didn't shoot him none," says I. "So to speak, he taken my gun away from me."

"Huh! Where is she? How is she?"

I had to tell him I didn't bring no word from Bonnie Bell at all, and hadn't seen her even.

"I couldn't stand it, Colonel," says I. "He made a awful strong talk to me, Colonel," says I.

He didn't say nothing for a long time. He begin to talk right slow then.

"I thought I had one friend in the world," says he, "one man I could rest on. But even you've gone back on me — even you failed me, Curly."

"Yes, Colonel," says I. "I've done a heap worse than that. I know how you feel and I feel the same way. I ain't fitten to be your foreman. You only brought me on here because you was so damn soft-hearted you couldn't fire me. You didn't use no judgment or you'd of fired me then, and a hundred times since then. All this whole mix-up was because I didn't have no brains — I couldn't see a load of hay; yet it was me that was doing all the seeing — you never took no hand in it at all. Shore, I fell down! You ain't firing me right now; I fire myself. I've come back to say that to you, Colonel. I taken about a week in Cody to think it all over — with help."

He only set and looked at me, and I had a hard time trying to talk. I told him where them two was living.

Then all at once the whole picture of the old days, when him and me was young, seemed to come up before him. He flared up like only part of him had been afire inside. He got up and walked up and down, with his hands clinched tight.

"Damn you all!" says he, and his eyes was like coals now. "What have I done to any of you? What have I done wrong to anybody that I should deserve this? Can't you remember when you was a man, Curly? Can't you remember when you and me set on the gate of the big pasture, with our rifles acrost our knees, and waited for them sheepmen to come up and try to get them sheep through us? Did they get through? No; no one had us buffaloed. That was when you and me was men, Curly.

"What have we done now? We let this damn hypocrite, Dave Wisner, get the best of us all the way down the line. He's married his hired man to my girl; and he's set up that hired man out on the old home ranch, where her ma and me made our first start. Could anything be harder for me to bear than that? You was on the gate, Curly; and you let 'em through."

"He said they was plumb happy — them two, Colonel," says I. "What in hell could I do, Colonel? It all come over me. I could see the sun shining; I could feel the wind blowing again, like it was in the old days."

"Happy!" says he. He was half whispering now and his voice was like that of a right old man. "Happy! So was I — so was her ma — out there in the old log house, with the mountains, and the sun shining, and the wind blowing. Curly," says he, "what made her throw her life away? What made us come here at all?"

"I wish you'd stake me to some ham and aigs, Colonel," says I, "before I go. I met a fellow a while back that was broke; so I haven't et much."

"Go eat, man," says he. "And don't talk to me about going away."

"What's that?" says I.

"You're a damn, worthless, trifling cowhand and you'll never be anything different. I ought to fire you — ought to of done it long ago; but I fire my own men — they don't fire theirselfs. Go eat."

"Can't you eat none now, too, Colonel?" I ast him.

"Not yet," says he. "Maybe after a while."

I went out and got the first square meal I'd had fo two days. When I couldn't eat no more right then, I sort of taken a pasear around the house, which was looking like hell by now. When I come back I seen a electric brougham out at our front yard. Tom Kimberly was just coming in. Out in the brougham I seen two girls. One was Katherine and the other seemed like it was Sally Henderson.

"I sha'n't try to say anything, Mr. Wright," says Tom Kimberly after a while to the old man—"only, whatever Bonnie Bell's done, she's done because she's thought it was best. She's tried to do what was honest and fair. If she didn't love me it wouldn't have been fair to marry me. She never said she'd marry me; she said she'd tell me sometime. It was her right to decide for herself. I wish her well, hard as that is for me to say."

"Yes; I know," says the old man. "She was a fine girl, Tom. But she ain't the only one in the world at that; and she had freckles, some—they get worse when they get old. There's plenty girls in the world handsomer'n her—always is plenty. If I hadn't happened to marry her ma, Tom, I'd of married any other of half a dozen more girls, like, just as they come along. They're all alike, anyways, you see; so don't take it hard."

He was a damn old liar! He never would of married no other woman in the world but the one he did marry, and he knew it; but he was trying to make Tom feel more comfortable. So Tom he set there and lit a cigarette. His trousers was right short, and when he hitched 'em up I seen he wore garters — blue ones. I was reconciled then.

After a time he got up and said good-by to us. Then he went out to where the brougham was standing in the street. One of the girls inside opened the door for him to get in — maybe Sally Henderson.

XXVIII

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

A PAPER come out, with a picture of the Wisner fence, showing the place where the hole had been broke through. It was marked with a star to show where it was at. The man that wrote the story said here was a modern case of Pyramus and Thisbe. Who they was I don't know; but like enough they lived on the South Side. There was pictures this time of our William and their Emmy. I didn't read any more about the thing, for I was sore on the whole business, and considerable worried about Old Man Wright, what he was going to do. But at part of the piece it said something I happened to see.

> Evidently [it says] though it may be difficult for a young man to kiss a girl through a four-foot wall, this aperture, opening or orifice, without doubt or question originally was intended as an avenue for Mr. Pyramus to achieve access occasionally, if not to the lips, at least to the ears of little Miss Thisbe. Which leaves it only a question of who was Mr. Pyramus and who Miss Thisbe. As to this, Alderman Wright has steadily denied himself to the press, while Mrs. Wisner, the only member of the family at home on the north side of the wall, also refuses to talk. It is well

known that Mr. Wisner has been absent in Europe on important business connected with the war loan —

I read that far to Old Man Wright and then he broke out.

"War loan!" says he. "It's a loan for his own self that he's looking for. He's lost four million dollars on that irrigation scheme of his when he bought our ranch. Now I'm going to foreclose and he knows it. He's got his funds tied up in cargoes of meat and grain that ain't cashed in. He's short, and damn short! And I know it; and these are times when banks ain't loosening much. War — yes; I'll show him war! There can't nobody get title to a foot of that land till Old Man Wisner gets his title from me — and he ain't never going to get it. If it's my last act I'll ruin him. I trusted you, and you turned me down. I trusted her, and she threw me down. I won't trust nobody no more, except myself.

"What's it come to?" says he to hisself after a while, looking around at the big rooms. "What did it all come to, what I done for her? And I give up the ranch for her and give up the life I loved!"

"The sun was on the hills when I was out there, Colonel," says I to him, sudden, happening to think of something, "and the sky was blue as it ever was; and the wind was just carrying the smell of the sage, like it used to; and the river was running white on the riffles, same as it did before. And the cows ——"

"Don't, Curly!" says he. "Don't!"

"I won't no more, Colonel," says I. "I won't be on your pay roll much longer; but them old days ——"

"Don't!" says he. "I can't think about the old days no more. I'm closing the books now, Curly."

"So'm I," says I.

"What do you mean?" says he. "I ain't right clear about some things."

"No; you ain't," says I. "So long as it's fair war I'm in with you; but when it comes to making war on women and children — I ain't in."

"Children! Curly, what do you mean?"

"Children," says I, "is all there is to things. Buck the game the way you want to, Colonel," says I; "but when you buck the child game you're bucking God Almighty His own self. He's got it framed up so He can't lose. Them two couldn't help theirselfs. I've got to finish some day, same as you. All right; I'll finish with them."

Then I shooked hands with him and he done so with me. He looks me keen in the eyes and I looks him keen back. We didn't neither of us weaken. This was a heap the hardest thing we'd ever faced together, but we didn't neither of us flicker. We'd both decided what we thought was right.

"Son," says he after a while, "you're some man after all." And he puts his hand on my shoulder like he used to.

"She ain't got no ma," says I to him the last thing. "I'm half her pa, the only half she's got left; and I'll stick if her father don't. But she ain't got no ma. That's what makes me so sorry for the kid," says I.

He looks at me, with his eyes wide open, but he don't talk none.

"I seen her setting right there, Colonel," says I, "in this room, on our old hide lounge — her wringing her hands like she'd tear 'em apart. She was bucking a hard game then, and doing her best to play it fair — her just a kid, with no special chance to be so very wise, and not having no ma. She didn't have a soul to go to, and all that was worrying her was which side of the game she really was on. For she knowed, even if we didn't, like I told you just now — she must of knowed it somehow — there's one particular game that God Almighty plays so He can't lose."

He groaned like I hated to hear. But he didn't weaken. I knowed he couldn't quit.

XXIX

HOW THE GAME BROKE

TODAY was the day Old Man Wisner was to get home; and that evening me and Old Man Wright laid out to go over there and have a talk with him. So a lot of things had to be done that day.

Old Man Wright he got up at sunup, and almost all day he was busy in the room he used for a office at the house; he hadn't hardly went downtown at all since Bonnie Bell run away. He had a desk full of papers here, and now he sent for his lawyer and his barber to come over early in the day.

"Why, Alderman," says the lawyer man, "you act like you was making your last will and testament, and getting ready to close up business.

He laughs then; but Old Man Wright don't laugh.

"I am," says he. "It's time; I've been dead more'n a week now."

They made out some papers about houses and lots and stocks and things, how they was to be distributed in case of the deemise of the said John William Wright. Then after a while they come around to the papers in the big case we had against Old Man Wisner for the last deferred payment on the Circle Arrow trade that hadn't been paid yet and wouldn't be. Old Man Wright sets back and looks at them papers right ca'm.

"I know what Old Man Wisner's been East for," says he. "He couldn't raise that much money — nigh on a million dollars — on anything as wildcat as strawberries and cream in Wyoming; not these times. Even the banks is wise onto that now. Stenographers and clerks and ministers and doctors don't bite like they used to no more; it's harder to find people that's willing to pay in so much a month for a bungalow in Florida or Wyoming while they set home engaged in light and genteel employment. Every oncet in a while the American people gets took with a spasum of a little horse sense. There's places for peaches and cream, and there's places for cows, but you don't want to get your wires crossed.

"So," says he, "I know I've got Old Man Wisner broke right now. He's been over to Holland to see if he couldn't form a Dutch syndicate for to unload on. The Dutch is the last resort of the American landboomer. When you can't sell out a bunch of greasewood land for a pineapple colony to no one else, go over and sell it to them Dutch; they're easy. I seen a man one time sell almost all the north end of New Mexico to a Dutch syndicate for a coffee plantation. It was good for cows; but he had pictures of steamboats and canals and things out there in the sagebrush — you've got to have a canal on your blueprint if you sell anything to them Holland people. Like enough Old Man Wisner had pictures of canals. But he couldn't sell this property none, following on the war over there; they're busy with other things.

"The result is he's come back here broke. He knows the banks has got wise and they ain't going to back him no further than they have. They're too busy lending a billion dollars or so to the folks over in Europe to help blow up some steamboats for us.

"Therefore," says he, jarring the paper weight on the table when he brings down his fist, "if times gets any harder, as like enough they will, Dave Wisner's got to let that property go on the market for what it'll bring inside his one year of grace after foreclosure. I know what that means; it'll mean I got a few thousand acres of land more to distribute among my heirs and assigns, my executors, friends, faithful servitors, villagers and others — however you got that figured out in them papers.

"Let me see them papers," says he after a while. "Are you shore you got my girl's name spelled Katherine? And that she gets this city residence here?"

Then they went over it again. But after a while the lawyer got done, and so did the barber, and they both went away; and the old man turns to me.

"Curly," says he, "I'm rich. I'm awful rich. I didn't know how rich I was till I begun to figure it up with Fanstead, Maclay & Horn, my lawyers here. I reckon, taking fair values, I'm worth ten or twelve million dollars — maybe twenty or forty — most of it made in this here town in a couple of years or so, and all out of the Wisner money we got for the ranch, which we're going to get back pretty nigh clean of cost, you might say. I didn't mean to; but I'm rich — awful rich!

"And so, seeing I ain't got no heirs of my own blood and kin, I been looking around for a few others. There's that Katherine; she's a good girl. She kissed me right here once." And the old man put his hand on the top of his head. "I'm going to give her a little something after I'm dead; for instance, this house and the things here — half a million dollars maybe. Likewise, I've fixed up a few things for my faithful servitor aforesaid, Henry Absalom Wilson — which is you, Curly. I give you only enough for cigarette money," says he; "never mind how much. And as for them two," says he —"her and the Wisners' hired man — not a cent! Not a damned cent! I'll show him!

"The old ranch," says he, "is going to be fixed up sometime — some of my heirs and executors'll get a hold of that. It's easy to get plenty of heirs if you have twelve or fifty million dollars. I've left instructions to make improvements out there. It'll sort of be the best apology I can make to the woman that's buried out there — Gawd bless her! — as good a woman as ever lived on earth. I can't see how she could have such a girl like she done. Well," he finishes, sort of sighing. "I done my best. I may not live more'n thirty or forty years more.

"So, now then, Curly," says he after a while, "since we've finished all our day's work and have a little time left, we can now engage in some simple pastime, such as mumblety-peg, or maybe marbles, till later in the evening. I'm through cutting her off, Curly, and I'm happy. I've left it as clean as I know how. Now I'll bet you a thousand dollars I can beat you three games out of five at mumblety-peg. My executor, without bond," says he, going right on, "is Old Man Kimberly."

"You're on, Colonel," says I; "though I don't know where I'll get a thousand till after your will is probated."

So we went outdoors and set down on the grass and played mumblety-peg — me losing that thousand, natural. Then we sort of fussed around outdoors one way or another till it come towards dark. He left me after a while and went into the house alone.

When I went in I seen him standing by hisself in our ranch room, looking at some things he'd picked up. They was a white silk scarf and a pair of long white gloves — he'd like enough found 'em back of the sofa, where Bonnie Bell probably dropped 'em the night when I seen her setting there wringing her hands because she didn't know what to do. We never let no one clean up the ranch room. He put 'em down soft on the sofa and smoothed out the scarf and folded the gloves; it was like he was laying 'em away in a drawer.

We didn't enjoy nothing much to eat, not even ham and aigs. It begun to get dark right soon after that and I sort of wandered out on the front walk to look around. Old Man Wright was in the house by hisself.

Right then I seen a car come in right fast and pull up at the sidewalk about halfway between our house and the Wisners'. Someone got out of the car and come running up our walk. I could see it was a woman. Not wishing no one to be bothered then, I went down to meet her.

It was Bonnie Bell! She'd come home then.

I run down the walk to meet her and pushed her away. I knew it wouldn't do for them two to meet now. But she run up and put her arms around my neck. She was alone, though there was someone in the car that hadn't got out.

"Curly!" says she, "Curly! I saw you standing there and I came in. Where is he, Curly?"

I nods behind me.

"In there," says I. "Don't go in — you mustn't."

"I must, sometime. Let me go now."

"No you don't," says I. "You can't. It's too late."

"Too late? Too late? Why, what do you mean, Curly? I've — I've come back! I want to see my dad! I've got to see my dad. There's lots I must tell him. He don't know — I didn't know."

"You can't see your dad no more, kid," says I. "That time has went by. I'm foreman here till midnight of today; and while I am there ain't nobody going to bother him. He's had trouble enough already."

She stood sort of shaking. I had her wrists in my hands now.

"When it's all over," says I — "meaning a few things we're going to settle tonight — I'll come out to you in Wyoming. I won't be foreman here no more. I'm going to go and throw in with you, even against the old man."

She begun to cry now.

"What are you talking about? I want him!" says she. "I want to see my dad. I need him — and he needs me!"

"Yes; he does need you," says I. "He's needed you for a long time. But you wouldn't like to see him now; he's changed a heap. He ain't got a friend left on earth except me, and that ends at midnight. He's had it pretty rough, when you come to think it all over," says I.

"I must go in, Curly," says she.

"No; you can't," says I. "I'm foreman and I won't let you. He wouldn't want it; he's marked you off his books — we just been doing that today, with a lawyer and a barber.

"But, Curly, he doesn't know ——"

"Huh!" says I. "Well, he thinks he does. He figures you're the same as if you was dead."

"Curly!" she cries now hard. "Curly, it mustn't be! It's all a mistake; it's all been a mistake. I've come back ——"

"Yes," says I; "it was a mistake. It ain't been nothing but a mistake all down the line. But, as far as it can be squared, the old man and me we've set out to square it tonight. Him and me is going to call on Old Man Wisner this evening," says I. "We're going over as soon as Old Man Wisner gets home. I'm going with your pa, Bonnie. You know me and

I reckon you know him too. I reckon there may be some plain conversation."

"I've got to see him!" says she over and over again.

"Well, if you want to see him," says I, "you go on over there and, like enough, you will see him before long. You belong that side the wall now. Tonight is when Old Man Wright and me settles with Old Man Wisner, and settles permanent. We live on this side."

She turns now and runs away so fast I couldn't catch her.

I seen someone get out of the car now — a man; and she taken his arm and they both went out of sight around the end of the wall. I allowed they'd went up to the door. Right soon I seen a light in their higher windows above the wall — you could just see that much from where I was standing. If I'd wanted to go upstairs I might of seen more from our windows; but I wouldn't do that now.

I went back in the house and stood near our door, watching the street. In about half or three-quarters of a hour I seen Old Man Wisner's car coming in; there was lights in the car and I could see him plain. He was setting with his head kind of bent down. I suppose, like enough, he'd already been served with them papers of ours down town. He'd got into town early that morning and been busy all day at his office. He was just getting home now. He must of knowed he was busted.

I waited for half a hour more, so things could get right settled down over there, and then I went in and found Old Man Wright. He was setting still as a dead man, looking into the fireplace in our ranch room, though there wasn't no fire. He was all dressed up in his evening clothes; and now I seen why he'd had the barber come. There wasn't a finer-looking gentleman in all the town than Old Man Wright was right then — though him pale and sad. Lord, how sad he was! But not can-nye — none whatever, him, even if Old Lady Wisner had called us all that.

"He's come, Colonel," says I, quiet, turning from one sad old man to another sad old man.

I didn't say nothing to him about who else I'd seen in our front yard; I didn't want to stir him all up, for I knowed he'd marked Bonnie Bell off'n his books and closed the books for keeps. When I spoke to him he turns around and stands up, quiet.

"Very well," says he; "we'll go on over now."

So us two walk together out of our front door. He shuts the door then behind him and we go on down the walk together. He only turns once and looks back at the house.

The whole street laid there in front of us when we walked out from our yard to go over into theirs. The lights was all lit now, miles and miles of 'em; and below us was the hundreds of thousands more of the lights of the big city — the city that hadn't made us as happy as we thought it was going to. I heard a boat whistle deep somewheres out on the lake — it sort of made my stomach tremble.

Over west, beyond our part of the city, you could hear a low sort of sound like maybe of street cars; but on our side there wasn't anything but automobiles — thousands of 'em — going along as swift and smooth as birds. Most of them was going north still; but on the other side of the street some was going down, maybe with people going to the theaters. It was about the time when people in the city eat what they call dinner. The moon was coming up back of our house, which lay there all black — not a light in it now. I could see the flower beds in our yard, and the white naked statutes standing there. It looked right pretty, but cold like a graveyard.

The front door was shut and, the moon being up over east, the part of the house toward us was blacklike. I remembered what the lawyer man had said about things being signed, sealed and delivered. Well, we'd closed the books. It was to hell with them Better Things!

I didn't tell Old Man Wright that Bonnie Bell had been there, because he had things hard enough the way it was and I was working for him yet a little while. He was ca'm as a summer day now.

I'd been his deputy once or twice when we had to go and arrest a bad man. He was now just like he was then. He walks, his thumbs, on both sides, just resting on the waistband of his pants. I don't know what he had in his mind; but you couldn't of saw the sign of a gun on him and I'd throwed my gun away. His coat tails hung straight down. Outside he was plumb civilized. His face was white and he looked right gentle — just gentle. He wasn't. As for changing him, it would of been as easy to change one of them marble statutes over in our garden.

Them Wisners wasn't watching their own gate like they'd ought to of. We walked on up their stairs and the old man rung the bell and stood there, his face without no expression now.

We heard some noises inside there — their dog begun to bark and it seemed like people was talking. Their William opened the door and we all stood there.

Old Man Wright reaches out his arm and pushes him to one side, and him and me go on in, walking fast toward the middle of the house.

XXX

HOW IT COME OUT AFTER ALL

THERE was a curtain acrost the door between the hall and the room beyond. Old Man Wright made one sweep and throwed open the whole room before us. We stood there in the door, neither of us making any move. Everything stopped then. There wasn't nobody talking no more. What we seen before us was something you couldn't hardly of figured on seeing at all.

They was all setting at the dinner table and they was all dressed up. There was Old Man Wisner and the old lady, and Bonnie Bell — she was setting next to the old lady. Just beyond, and square acrost the table from us, facing us, was the hired man — the man on whose account we'd come to square things now and leave them signed, sealed and delivered.

I thought it was right funny for their hired man to be eating with them, and him all dressed up just like them. Then I remembered how fresh he'd always been and how he'd bragged about the pull he had with them people. And I remembered the talk I'd heard between him and Old Lady Wisner too. Anyways, there he was setting, big as life; and if they was having any trouble over anything you couldn't see it. No one was shedding no tears and there didn't seem to be no war going on.

I felt like I was up in the air. I felt like I'd been dreaming about something and hadn't woke up. I couldn't figure out what it was I seen. No one spoke a word.

You must remember that Old Man Wright didn't know yet Bonnie Bell was anywhere within three thousand miles of him. And when he pulled aside the curtain there she was, setting right at their table! And right acrost was a young man setting, too — a young man who he don't know none.

You see, he never had saw that hired man at all, so as to know him. I hadn't told the old man about Bonnie Bell being there, because I allowed he'd find it out anyways. Now he had.

It was Bonnie Bell that moved first — for she knew what might happen. She made one jump for her pa and threw her arms round him — not around his neck, but down around his arms. She didn't try to kiss him — she didn't say a word; she was scared. She knowed where he carried his gun — up under his shoulder. I never knowed whether she found it or not.

"No!" says she, quick; and she locked her hands behind his back so he couldn't get his arms loose.

"No! No; you can't — you shan't! No, no!" she says. "Dad! Dad!"

Ordinary she would of been no more than a straw to him, he was that strong. But, you see, he wasn't expecting to see her — and a lot of things come over him all at once. Here she was, with her arms around him anyways, no matter what for.

For once Old Man Wright forgot. His hand only kind of went out to hers where they was, and he says, trembly:

"Bonnie, girl! I didn't know you was here!"

By that time everybody was on their feet. The hired man starts for us, but I stopped him.

"Not yet," says I. "I'm working for the old boss till midnight tonight. You stay where you are."

When I said that Old Man Wisner and Old Lady Wisner they just froze right where they was. But Bonnie Bell didn't. She turns to me now and I felt her hand on my arm.

"What do you mean, you men? Are you crazy?" says she. "I'll not have this! Set down! You, Curly — you make any break here and I'll slap you in the face," says she. "You hear me? Don't you start anything here!"

Well, now, you wouldn't think we'd all been broke up thataways just by a girl, would you? But she had us on the run before we got started. It was mostly because of all this being so unexpected. I didn't expect to see the hired man at their table and Old Man Wright didn't expect to see Bonnie Bell at all; so the whole herd begun to mill round.

She pushed her pa down into a seat, and me too.

"So that's the way you act when I'm not here!" says she. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," says she. "I won't have any more of this."

Their hired man set down now, right serious. He didn't laugh none nor try to pass it off. We all knew that it was a show-down, that it was a settlement, and that it had to go through.

Old Man Wright he didn't seem to look at anyone but Bonnie Bell. If you can say a man can look hungry with his eyes, that's the way he looked then. By this time she was crying, and she puts her arms around his neck now.

"Dad!" says she. "Pore old dad! Pore old foolish, unhappy dad!" Now she begins to kiss him some; but he can't talk none — only pats her shoulders.

"I'm the wretchedest, wickedest girl on earth," says she to him, pushing back his hair, "and I'm the happiest too! Dad, listen to me. You mustn't sit in judgment. Don't take things so hard. Wait — try to see. Try to see if maybe there isn't some other will in the world besides your own, dad — maybe some will bigger than all of ours. I couldn't help it, dad — I couldn't! I'm so happy," says she, "so foolish happy now!"

"Happy?" says he at last; and he pushes her away from him. "With him, there?" He nods now at the hired man, having got him placed. "What's he doing here?" says he.

"Why shouldn't he be here?" says Old Man Wisner right then, speaking for the first time. "He's my son!"

"What's that?" says Old Man Wright. "Your *son!"*

"Shore!" says he. "Who'd you think he was? He can eat at my table. He's done well; he's married the best girl I ever seen!" says he. Then he gets so he can't talk worth a cent too.

Shucks! I wisht I was most any place else. His son! How could his son be his hired man, and where was the hired man if this wasn't him? I felt myself begin to get sweaty on my face and all over. I'd been one awful fool, me.

"Dave Wisner," says Old Man Wright, "I come acrost to settle things with you. Our account is some long. You've made it hard for me — awful hard! — when you made your hired man run off with my girl. Your son! What kind of talk is this? What do you mean?"

"But he *is* our son!" says Old Lady Wisner right then, her speaking for the first time. "In heaven's name, who did you *think* he was? Hired man! What do you mean?"

"It's what I been trying to tell you and Curly," says Bonnie Bell now, holding to her pa's coat with one hand and patting him hard on the shoulder with the other. "I told you it was all a mistake — everything was all mixed up. Except for Gawd's mercy sending me here right now, somebody might of been killed, for all I know," says she. "You men ain't got no more brains than a rabbit. It's time I come!"

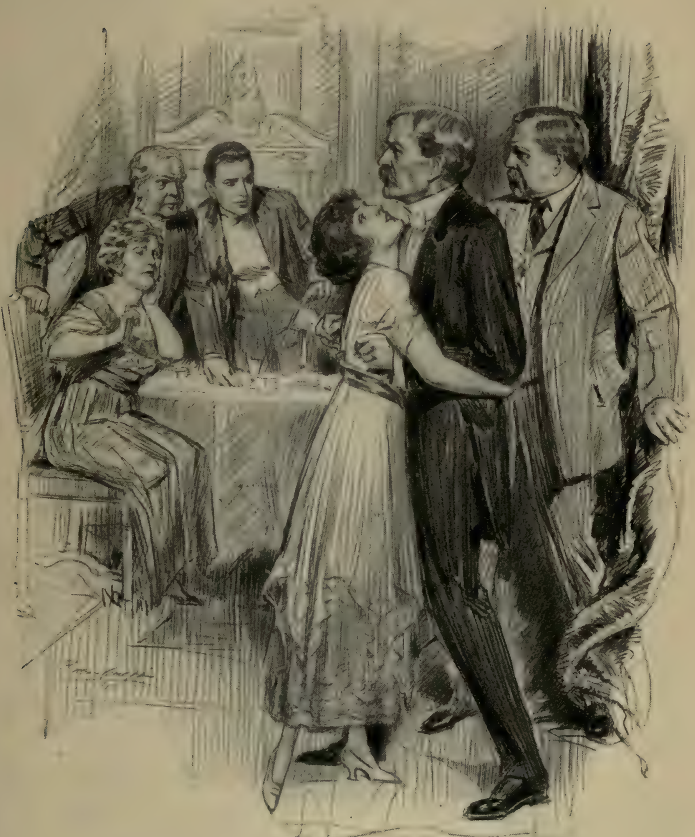
"Your *son!"* says Old Man Wright. *"Son!* And Curly said he was your hired man!"

Old Man Wisner laughs right out loud at that.

"Hired man! Oh, I see how you thought that! You maybe seen him pottering around in the flowers like — he was always dotty about them things — but no hired man; he wasn't hardly worth a salary."

"And what do you think?" laughs Bonnie Bell at Old Lady Wisner then. "His mother thought once I was a hired girl!"

Old Lady Wisner for quite a while she'd been playing a sort of accompaniment, talking to herself. First, she starts in and says: "Oh, my laws! Oh, my laws sakes! Oh my laws sakes alive!"— over and over again, she was that scared. And now she



" She knowed where he carried his gun."

begun to say: "Bless my soul! Gawd bless my soul! Oh, Gawd bless my soul!" And she says that right over and over again too.

"I told you, Curly," says Bonnie Bell now, "that there'd been a mistake all around. Why didn't you tell my dad I was here?"

"Well," says I, "I allowed he'd find it out after a while. Ain't he?"

I was sweating awful now and I felt how red my hair was. I toed in so bad my legs was crossed.

"I've found out a lot of things," says Old Man Wright now, right sudden and swift. "I been making some mistakes my own self; but you"— and he faces their hired man now — "you passed yourself off for a servant."

"That's true, sir," says he. "I was under false colors for a long while and I hated it as much as anyone could. But what could I do? I couldn't find any way to meet her. I didn't want her money and I didn't want her to want mine. Well, that's how it happened. I deceived you all, that's true. I deceived her too — she didn't really know who I was until less than a week ago. Then she came home."

"Why didn't you come and tell me at first?" says Old Man Wright.

"How could I?" says he. "I knew what that would mean, from all Curly said. Besides, I wanted to win her just for what I was — just for what she was. I wanted to be sure she'd love me the way I wanted, for just what I was. I'm sure now.

"But I was going to come and tell you; we came on now for that very thing — the two of us, as you see. It wasn't any pleasure for me to deceive either you or her — I never liked that any more than you did."

Old Man Wright he just set looking at him, and he couldn't talk. The young fellow went on.

"I loved her the first time I saw her, sir," says he. "I resolved, the first time I ever saw her, that sometime I'd marry her. I did. And we're happy — we're happier than I ever thought anybody could be. How can you bear a grudge against a girl like that — your own girl? She's only done what she thought was right. And it was right too! And it goes!"

"So you're the son of this family!" says Old Man Wright, slow. "That can't be helped, neither. I — well, I didn't know. I — I thought you wanted her for her money. I'll go so far as to say that."

"It wouldn't of made any difference," says Bonnie Bell then. "I'd of married him anyway. It's just like he says — he never told me about it until just a little while ago. I thought he was some sort of a distant relative of the Wisner family. If you stop to think you can see how all these things happened easy enough. Especially you can when you stop to think that, on foot and off a horse, Curly is apt to do more fool things than a cageful of white rats — God bless him! Because nobody else but him could of done just what he's done!"

"Well, it does seem to me," says I then, "that most of this happened account of me. I reckon I made about as many fool breaks as any fellow could," says I. "Like I told your pa, I couldn't see a load of hay. But here's where I quit. It don't look like you need me no more, for things is mixed up now as bad as they can get," says I.

"Keep still, Curly," says Bonnie Bell to me. "Set down!"

About then I seen them two old men looking at each other. Without saying nothing, they both got up and went out into the parlor together. We couldn't hear what they said. For that matter, we couldn't hear what we said ourselfs, because of something that happened around in there.

Their collie dog, Cæsar, was barking at us when we come in. He'd sort of got under the table. But now we heard another dog barking plumb crazy. And now in comes from somewhere, out in the garridge or the car maybe, that Boston dog, Peanut, of Bonnie Bell's!

He was looking for a settlement too. He don't hesitate, but he goes straight for this collie under the table, and they mix it plenty right then and there, till most of us was glad enough to get up on the chairs. I tried to stop them and the old lady and Bonnie Bell was both hollering at them; but the hired man he raised his hand.

"Let them alone!" says he. "They got almost human intelligence someways," says he. "Let 'em alone, so they can have it out."

So they had it out for quite a while there in the dining-room, under the table and among the chairs, and under the sofa, and pretty much everywhere, both of 'em enjoying of theirselfs plenty. Their dog, Cæsar, had got older now and Peanut he had his hands full; but he was shore industrious and sincere.

By and by, after quite a while, they hauled apart and set looking at each other, their tongues hanging out, happy and smiling. Peanut he goes over to his mistress, and he was shaking a ear that was loose. Cæsar he goes over to the old lady, limping and holding up his foot, him looking plumb contented.

"They'll get along all right now," says the hired man — James, or Jimmie, or Jim, whatever you ought to call him.

I couldn't believe he was young Mr. James Wisner. Sometimes I don't hardly even yet.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," says

Bonnie Bell. "I declare, men are brutes anyhow!"

"I know it, Bonnie Bell," says I. "I've made plenty of trouble, but not no more. I'm taking the morning train West," says I.

"Where to?" she ast me; and I can't answer — for me the whole world was upside down, same as this room here.

About then the two old men come back into the room, both of them serious; but you could see easy that they hadn't had no war — only some kind of a squaring and settling up; I reckon because of Bonnie Bell and this James, or Jimmie, or Jim, not being no hired man none after all, which maybe he had a strawberry mark on his arm — I don't know how they proved it.

Old Man Wright he stood up, with his hand on top of a chair; and he made a little after-dinner talk that cost him, maybe, several million dollars — not that he cared!

"I come here tonight," says he, "to maybe take the law into my own hands — anyways I reckon I come here to set in judgment; but I wasn't no good judge, because I was trying the case without having all of the facts. But I'm this kind of man," says he, "that when I've made a mistake, and know it, I'm game to stand up and say so. That's what I'm doing now. I reckon I been wrong. Some things you can't help. I ain't going to try to help this no more.

"The fact is, I reckon, maybe it's the best thing that could of happened. It didn't happen through me. I done my best to keep it from happening. That's where I was wrong. I'm glad of all this now and I take back what I said. I've been a twenty-two carat, pink-eyed, black-striped wild ass of the desert, though not halfway as big a fool as Curly. It was him that got us all in wrong."

Old Man Wisner he stands up too; and he makes his confession that's good for his soul. His Adam's apple kind of walked up and down his neck, but he come through.

"Don't say no more, Colonel," says he. "I'm to blame for all this myself. I was the biggest fool that ever was. That fence — why, that fence now ——"

James, or Jimmie, or Jim, and Bonnie Bell they looks at each other then and laughs right out.

"You didn't build it high enough," says he; "you couldn't!"

"I'm glad I couldn't," says Old Man Wisner. "Things are going to come out all right, the way they ought to come. I've learned a lot tonight — a lot about being neighbors. Son, we had a neighbor and we didn't know it. Maybe it's that way plenty times. We had one neighbor that has saved your father from being broke and disgraced before all the world — before tomorrow night. That's what kind of neighbors we had all along," says he; "and we tried to build a fence and keep them away from us! Yes; thank Gawd, I couldn't build the fence high enough," says he.

"I knew something about this, dad," says James, or Jimmie, or Jim, then. "I could of told you long ago that ranch deal couldn't win. Scale it down, get at the real business and human values, and it ought to win — and win big!"

Old Man Wisner he's always rather strong for organization. He looks over at Old Man Wright and they both look at this young man; and they both nod.

"That's a good idea," says Old Man Wright —"a damn good idea! Now then, we're beginning to talk. Why can't we throw the two businesses in together and make one hand wash the other, and let this young gentleman take care of the reorganization on the spot?"

"That's the idea!" breaks in Bonnie Bell right then. "There ain't any better cow country out-of-doors than the Yellow Bull Valley. I know that. Give us a chance and we'll pull this whole business out of the hole," says she.

"James," says Old Man Wright, and he walks around and holds out his hand, playing the game wide open, like he always done —"James," says he, "will you shake hands with the worst old fool there is in the whole world — except Curly?"

Now James he's been doing pretty well up to now, but this about knocks him out. He gets up, kind of red and startled, and he shakes hands with the Old Man; but he couldn't say nothing and didn't seem to know what to do with his hands. So he puts his hand in his pocket, like a man will, and he seems to feel something there; and all at once, not being able to think of nothing else, he pulls out what he found and holds it out to Old Man Wright.

"Colonel," says he, "will you have a chew? It's Arrow Head — same name as our home spring out there," says he. "I've used no other since. I just heard you own most of the stock in the Arrow Head Tobacco Company; but I ain't surprised. You ain't overlooked much!"

I reckon that was the luckiest accident ever happened to him — when he found that piece of plug. Old Man Wright taken a bite of it liberal, and says he:

"Son, do you wear garters?"

Everybody fell to laughing then, excepting me and Old Man Wright. It was serious for us. We was figuring on cowmen now. Bonnie Bell, she goes up to her pa once more and hugs him, and looks at the hired man.

"Don't mind him, Jim," says she. "He's awful sometimes; but he means all right and he has his own ways of figuring. I've got the best dad in the world!" says she.

"You had the best ma in the world," says Old Man Wright. "Seems to me sometimes you favor your ma," says he.

Then they kissed each other; fact is, most everybody got kissed around there excepting me. Yet, when you come to figure about it, I'd been responsible for a good many of those things and the way they come out, and I didn't get no credit for it. No foreman ever does.

Old Lady Wisner, like I said, she was setting there and saying mostly: "Gawd bless me!" and "Gawd bless my soul!"— nobody paying much attention to her. But now Bonnie Bell she sidles over to her and sort of puts out her hand, shy. The old lady she puts a arm around her, and she begins to cry too. They was both right happy. Dogs has to fight and women has to cry; then they're happy. I reckon them two had some sort of understanding.

"Son," says Old Man Wright after a while to James, or Jimmie, or Jim, "where have I saw you before?" He'd been looking at him for some time.

"The first time you ever seen me, Colonel," says he, "was when I fell in love with your daughter, sir," says he. "That was when I drove you home to your house on Christmas Eve."

"You drove — when you drove us home!" says Old Man Wright. "What do you mean about that? We had our own car; and I give the driver a ten-dollar gold piece that night because it was Christmas Eve. He got lit up; so he was wabbly next day too. I remember that."

"So do I," says James, laughing. "I've got that money now. But it was your real driver that got lit up, not me. You see, when Bonnie Bell come out in the storm that night she didn't notice that it wasn't her car. Hers looked a good deal like it — both the same make and right new. Maybe she wasn't very well acquainted with her new chauffore yet; so she says to me to take her home. So I had to do that."

"How did you know where to go?" ast Bonnie Bell then, laughing.

"I knew all about you!" says he. "I'd been busy for over a hour there in the hotel dining-room with Henderson, and that was long enough to learn all I ever wanted to know. I knew how rich you were. That was why I drove you home and didn't let you know who I was; that was why I never tried to call; that was why a lot of things happened right the way they did. I had some fool theories of my own, maybe; maybe I did get a touch of socialism or something of that kind when I was in college.

"But anyway, Colonel Wright," he goes on, "I want to say to you, sir, that I've known you and admired you a lot more than you ever knew. I voted for you for alderman — though my own dad was running against you. I thought you stood for what I thought was right. All the world is really neighbors," says he, "and the human democracy is good enough for me. I voted for you then — and I do now. My dad has a lot to learn."

He turns to his pa then, and the old man like to of blew up, he was so mad; but we all ended by laughing at this too.

"Son," says Old Man Wright, "did you say to me that you used one of them old-fashioned razors? I'm this sort of man that sometimes they say has got prejerdices. Now I always hone my own razors."

"So do I," says James, or Jimmie, or Jim.

The old man he hesitates a while and looks at him right sad; and he says, like he was talking to hisself:

"Well, well! I do wonder how I was such a hand-painted idiot all the time! I believe we shore can make a cowman out of you yet," says he.

"It's in sixes and sevens," says James, or Jimmie, or Jim, "but there's a chance there on that ranch.

Maybe I can learn. And it's so fine out there — with the mountains, and the skies, and the wind blowing in the sage, and the ——"

"Hush, man!" says Old Man Wright to him. "You're making me so homesick I can't stand it. We'll all go out there to live. I'll tell you what we'll do," says he in his rushing way, sort of taking the lead of things. "We'll keep these two houses in here for both of us for our city homes, and we'll all of us have the old ranch for our country homes," says he. "And we'll all run the business plumb sensible on good business lines," says he, "with the peaches and cream out, and the ribs, chucks and plates all in. Why, we'll ——"

"Oh, dad!" says Bonnie Bell, and she goes up to the old man, crying because she was happy. She'd seen him change right there before her — he'd got forty years younger in the last ten minutes. "Dad," says she —" dad, we will — when?"

"Daughter," says he, "we're going to begin right now to get them Better Things we started out for. You're going to have the place in life that your ma said you'd ought to have. You and Katherine," says he, "will have to fix it up about that house I was going to leave in my last will and testament. But, like I said, I'm going to give Kathrine half a million when she marries — if she marries as good a man as you did. You see, Katherine kissed me — right here in a soft spot — on top of my old bald head."

He rubs the place then. Bonnie Bell she kisses him there too — for maybe sever'l million.

After a while I sort of moved over toward the door, it seeming like it wasn't no place for me no more.

"Where you going?" says Old Man Wright to me; and Old Man Wisner he says something, too, about my not being in a hurry.

"I don't know, but I reckon I'll be moving along now. Looks like I been some foreman. I done all this. But what thanks do I get for it?"

I starts away to get outside this kissing zone, so to speak. I didn't know but Old Lady Wisner'd try to kiss me. I didn't want that to happen.

"Ho, ho!" says Old Man Wright, laughing like he did years ago. "Hear that fool boy talk, won't you, Dave? You can't quit, Curly," says he; "there's too much for you to do out there on the old ranch. Do you suppose you could teach this kid to rope?" says he.

"I already got a start at it," says I. "Him and me used to practice some."

Well now, that was how come us to square it all up, both sides, and come to a understanding that didn't noways seem possible just a little while before. That was how we come to go back to the old Yellow Bull country, for part of the year anyways. It was how a right bad run-in was saved. It was how Old Man Wisner was kept from busting wide open the next day, and, like enough, a bank or so along with him. Likewise it was how them two fortunes, maybe fifty or ninety million or more between them when they got things cleaned up, was joined till death do them part. When them two old fellows got to pulling together something had to crack. We shore got a business now — sever'l of 'em.

I got Jimmie — we come to call him that on the ranch — so he could rope some inside his first year, though I had to show him how to spread his loop a little wide and not to depend on soaping his hondoo.

It was like old times to see a kid beginning on the range in the one man's game that's worth while on earth — raising cows in a good cow country. I was glad I hadn't shot Jimmie, or my boss hadn't shot his pa — I wouldn't of minded so about Old Lady Wisner, because I couldn't help remembering how she'd made trouble deliberate from the first. Of course I'd made trouble, too, but I hadn't went to.

What become of the old wall between them two houses? Nothing much; we left it stand, for someways it didn't seem so high no more when Bonnie Bell's ivy and them other plants begun to hang down on it. But, of course, I had to bust the hole in a little bit bigger after a while, so as the twins could get through right easy, as well as Peanut. One was named David Abraham and the other John William; but they couldn't help it.

The best time was when we all rounded up one spring out there at the station to go out on the ranch for the spring round-up, and to start things running for the year. Old Man Wisner and the old lady was there, and Old Man Wright and Jimmie and Bonnie Bell and me — me that was foreman now and, like enough, earning it, the way things had been let go to pieces.

We'd come down from Cody to that station where I found Jimmie — time I was out hunting for him. For a while we'd been quite considerable busy getting things packed, ready to go out to the ranch. We had two wagons, one full of groceries and things. They'd even put in fly screens out there now and had rocking chairs to set around in. Old Man Wright was as busy as a fiddler getting things pulled together. His sleeves was rolled up, and all at once Jimmie looks at him and says:

"Colonel, if I'm not mistaken your freckles is coming back again."

The old man roars laughing at that.

"Yes," he says; "I'm almost fit to run for sher'f oncet more. Ain't it all like the old times, Curly?" says he.

"It shore is, Colonel," says I; "and there ain't no better times than them."

The old man he gets into the buckboard on one side and he taken the two twins on his knees. On the seat back of him was Pa and Ma Wisner — me riding with Old Man Wright, in the middle. She was a three-seat buckboard, and the mules was full of oats and plunging some; but Jimmie didn't mind — he was driving, with Bonnie Bell, on the front seat.

"All set?" says he, turning his head around; and Old Man Wright nods.

"Giddap!" says Jimmie, and turns 'em loose.

Bonnie Bell, she turns around halfway, half looking at him and half at the twins, and says she:

"Home, James!"

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